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ISSUE 04 | NOVEMBER 2010

ASSASSIN'S CREED: BROTHERHOOD

EZIO IS BACK... AND BRINGING THE PAIN! PG. 50

EA SPORTS MMA

Who needs the UFC?
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Medal of Honor

Hit or miss? Read our expert review! PG. 64

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MEET THE STAFF

Wil O'Neal Editor-in-Chief
While "testing" the Gunnar Optiks gaming glasses Wil played countless hours of Battlefied Bad Company 2. The things he does for his readers.

Andy Eddy Executive Editor
When he heard that we were getting another Andy on staff, Andy Eddy got worried. Relax, we're not grooming your replacement.

Andy Salisbury Associate Editor
The newest member of the @GAMER crew, Andy Salisbury is pleased to have both an Xbox 360 and a PS3... on his desk. Too bad all he does is fetch Wil's lunch.

Jenny Esdaile Art Director
Jenny abandoned us right when we were finishing up the issue so she could go to Hawaii. What nerve. We'll be sure to ruin her aloha spirit the day she returns.

Jillian Pierce Designer
If Jillian keeps smiling all the time, the Andys and Wil are gonna start thinking she doesn't mind when they're late with everything.

Letter from the EDITOR

WELCOME TO @GAMER

Just when you thought it was safe to step into your local Best Buy here we are again with the fourth issue of @GAMER.

Now it seems like every month I'm shipped off to some far-off land to get exclusive hands-on time with some exciting new game for our cover stories. There was exotic LA, followed by exotic LA, and then even more exotic Orange County. Needless to say I was more than thrilled to go to Montreal to check out Assassin's Creed: Brotherhood.

The latest installment in the series, Assassin's Creed: Brotherhood aims to take the series in exciting new directions.

Of course, being able to explore medieval Rome while wandering about a city like Montreal was tons of fun. But enough about that. In a world full of games that revolve around "guys with guns" the Assassin's Creed games are a welcome respite. And now that they have multiplayer, they're even more compelling.

I'd also like to welcome Andy Salisbury to @GAMER. We stole Andy from our sister pub, the World of Warcraft Official Magazine. Of course, having two Andys on staff is confusing and we're currently accepting suggestions for Andy Salisbury's nickname. I'm leaning toward Francis.

And lastly, be sure to check out the @GAMER podcast at http://atgamerpodcast.podbean.com/.

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Editor In Chief

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I tried to find out whether your coupons were platform-specific before ordering the magazine, but there was no information anywhere! So I figured: They'll probably make the coupon for the game, not the platform. Nope! Not only do several of the coupons work on only one gaming system, but there are absolutely no coupons for PC games. Why do you hate the PC?

—Matt via e-mail

ED: Worry not, Matt. While we've only had one PC coupon so far (*Assassin's Creed II* for the PC in Issue 1), our love for PC gaming is alive and well (with many thanks to our team's latest addition, who used to work at PC Gamer)! Along with the *Civilization V* coupon included in this issue, there's lots of cross-platform savings.

I just got a preview of your new videogame magazine at Best Buy! Great layout, content, and coupons. Definitely going to be competitive.

—@tgraw via Twitter

ED: Thanks for the kind words, tgraw! We hope that we're able to provide a great read, and we'll be sure to pass on your layout compliments to our wonderful designers.

I'm used to checking out my issue of @GAMER for the latest info on game releases, but I recently went into my local Best Buy and was unable to find a copy of it anywhere! What should I do?

—Frank via e-mail

ED: Many apolgoies that you weren't able to track down a copy of our lovely publication in your local store, but worry not! Soon the folks at Best Buy will be adding snazzy new preorder touchscreens that will give you information on preorder bonuses, upcoming releases, and every other detail available. Keep an eye out!

I just subscribed to the magazine, and was wondering if there is a coupon in this month's issue for *Dead Rising 2*? I want to be sure that I save as much money as I possibly can! Thanks for the coupons so far.

—Stephanie via Facebook

ED: Sadly, we don't have any *Dead Rising 2* coupons in this month's issue, but we do have a healthy review of it on page 70. Once you've checked that out, why not go browse this month's coupons? We've got one in there for *Super Street Fighter IV*, which might help you fulfill your recommended daily quota of destruction!

Hey, quick question. I recently subscribed but I haven't received Issue 2 (with the *Fallout: New Vegas* cover) yet. What gives?

—Roberto via Facebook

How might I go about changing the address associated with my subscription? I'll be moving soon, and want to make sure I don't miss anything.

—LeVar via Facebook

ED: While we can get the magazine out the door in a timely fashion, we don't have any control over your local neighborhood mail deliverer. If you're having issues getting your copy of the magazine late, or need it sent to a different address, head on over to our official website (www.atgamermagazine.com) and click "Customer Service" down at the bottom.

BEST BUY PREORDER TOUCHSCREENS!
You need information, and Best Buy has it. Check out the new in-store preorder touchscreens to find out the latest preorder bonuses and release dates and preorder any game!

CORRECTIONS:

We vowed to be perfect after issue one. But alas, the editors at @GAMER are in fact human.

In our preview of *EA Sports MMA* we gave the game an ESRB rating of M for Mature. In reality, *EA Sports MMA* is T for Teen.

This time we mean it, and will be perfect from here on out.

SURVEY:

And while you're at it, we'd love it if you would participate in this quick survey to tell us what you think of @GAMER: http://tiny.cc/FirstToKnow.

▲ OOPSIE!
Sorry about the mistakes in our second issue. Human error is a cruel mistress indeed.

BEST BUY CUSTOMER REVIEWS & RATINGS

WANT TO HAVE YOUR SAY?

What are you playing now? Do you like it? Do you hate it? Let the other @GAMER readers know what you think—send in a short 50- to 100-word review to reviews@atgamermagazine.com, and we'll repost some of them here each issue.

Submit your review to:
reviews@atgamermagazine.com

Recently my roommate purchased a PSN title called Shank. It's a Metal Slug-style shoot 'em up, with a striking art style that offers single and co-op story mode play. The single-player story mode was entertaining, but I really enjoyed the co-op story mode. For only fifteen dollars I thought it was a fun (but violent) way to spend a few hours.

—John-Paul

▸ **WHO KNEW?** The rumors were true: Sonic is a real person. He lives in Japan and collects sneakers.

▾ **PRINGLES!** *Marvel vs. Capcom 3* was a huge draw, probably one of the most-anticipated sequels at the show.

▸ **A SHRINE?** Nope, just another promotional booth, of which TGS has zillions.

▾ **FRESH** *El Shaddai* combines platforming with stunning watercolor graphics.

▲ **FAN FIGHTER** *Ys vs. Legend of Heroes* is 100% pure fanservice for Falcom RPG die-hards. Will it hit the States?

▸ **MEGA MAN?** Negative. That's a character from *Cardfight!! Vanguard*, a collectible card battling game.

TOKYO GAMES SHOW 2010

Every year thousands of gamers descend upon Tokyo to play games, eat great food and generally run amok

This year's Tokyo Game Show was the most exciting in years—finally, Japanese developers seem to be getting their groove back, after years of protracted struggle.

EA finally debuted Grasshopper Manufacture's Shadows of the Damned, created by Shinji Mikami (*Resident Evil 4*) and SUDA 51 (*No More Heroes*). Despite that pedigree, the trailer was anticlimactic. And though we know its hero battles demons, we can only guess that it might play like *Resident Evil*. At least it has attitude.

Speaking of attitude, the new head of Koei

▲ **KONAMI CENTRAL** We couldn't miss Konami's booth. Its big games were *Metal Gear Solid: Rising* and *Castlevania: Lords of Shadow*.

▲ **LEFT-FIELD** *Ryu ga Gotoku Of the End* is the latest in SEGA's popular *Yakuza* series. It's also freakin' crazy, taking place in a post-apocalyptic, zombie-addled Tokyo. SEGA, you are amazing.

Tecmo's Team Ninja, Yosuke Hayashi, promised to outdo his iconoclastic predecessor, Tomonobu Itagaki, with new *Dead or Alive* and *Ninja Gaiden* games.

Capcom's *Devil May Cry* reboot (called just "DMC") surprised the TGS audience—it concentrates on demon-hunter Dante's early days. Better-looking was Asura's Wrath. Stylish and insane, it features a very pissed-off god who can take tons of punishment but never die.

Level 5's *Ni no Kuni* stood out; a collaboration with Academy Award-winning animators Studio Ghibli (*Spirited Away*), this PS3 RPG features beautiful graphics that look like an animated film. And if that's not gorgeous enough for you, Ignition's *El Shaddai* married *Devil May Cry*-inspired action to almost hallucinatory graphics.

Meanwhile, Sony's Team Ico showed off its latest, *The Last Guardian*, which promises more dynamic gameplay than *Shadow of the Colossus*—which will be bundled with early PS2 classic *Ico* on PS3 next year.

Microsoft's best announcement was a new version of the 1998 Treasure-developed classic *Radiant Silvergun* for Xbox Live Arcade. (Never heard of it? Go download *Ikaruga*, and then imagine an even better game.)

Square Enix once again showed *Final Fantasy Versus XIII*. Based on the short gameplay trailer shown at TGS, it might just make up for FF13.

Sadly, despite rumors of a November Japanese release, the Nintendo 3DS was nowhere to be seen—presumably Nintendo, which skips TGS, banned developers from showing off games on the system.

THE NEW XBOX CONTROLLER

A new Xbox 360 deserves a new Xbox 360 controller

AN OLD FRIEND
As the saying goes, if it ain't broke, don't redesign the analog sticks. They remain as responsive as ever.

AHH, FINGERPRINTS!
The 360 controller is just the latest high-tech device to gain a glossy black finish. It joins the newly black, glossy, slimmed-down Xbox 360.

It's not uncommon for a game-console maker to come out with new hardware mid-cycle—the PlayStation Move and Microsoft Kinect are perfect examples. Microsoft's soon-to-debut Xbox 360 Wireless Controller with Transforming D-pad is also one... though to a much lesser degree.

At first glance, the new controller appears to be of the same size and configuration as the normal Xbox 360 controller, with the only obvious difference coming in the color. The main body of the device is a matte silver with glossy black highlights around the outside edge. And the A/B/X/Y face buttons are various shades of white, black and gray, instead of the normal green/red/blue/yellow.

However, Microsoft added a twist—literally. In its "cross" setting, the shiny chrome D-pad projects out from the unit, with deeply recessed gray plastic between each segment. This is a departure from the one-piece plastic disc D-pad of the old controller. But rotate the cross 90 degrees counterclockwise and you'll discover the controller's alternate mode, with the gray backing plastic rising up to transform the D-pad into a more familiar disc. Fancy!

The concept is that, in normal mode, the cross stands out more, making the D-pad's four primary directions feel more distinct to your fingertips. In the alternate disc mode, the D-pad will supposedly make sweeping moves—like those you'll find in fighting games, for instance—easier and smoother, because there's less resistance as you move your thumb around the surface.

FOLKS WHO ARE SERIOUS ABOUT FIGHTERS WILL JUST GET A JOYSTICK

BUNDLE OF JOY?

accessory, but $65 for the bundle isn't chump change. It would've been nice to be able to buy the controller separately, especially since many 360 players will already own a Play & Charge Kit.

MONOCHROMATIC
We're not quite sure why Microsoft went and changed all the button colors. Further, why are A and Y the same shade of silver?

PLAY & CHARGE
The new 360 controller will ship with the much-loved Play & Charge kit.

In practice, however, the cross and backing disc weren't quite flush enough to not "catch" a little bit when I made a quarter-circle with the D-pad. Besides, folks who are serious about playing fighting games to the level of competition that this controller purports to cater to will likely just invest in an arcade joystick, which can make sliding moves smoother still.

There's also the question of whether changing the colors of the face buttons is actually a good idea, considering that Microsoft has spent nine years now defining those buttons by their colors to make certain in-game actions more intuitive and reflexive. A casual player or someone new to the Xbox world might struggle with these buttons if a color-coordinated prompt came up onscreen, as they often do.

With the same $64.99 price tag as a regular wireless controller with Play & Charge Kit, you aren't paying extra for the fancy D-pad, so there's no harm in making this a replacement or a supplemental controller should you wish to take the plunge. Microsoft plans to ship this new controller around November 9, so soon you'll be able to test it out for yourself.

POP-O-MATIC D-PAD

CROSS PLAY
In cross mode the four primary directions pop out from the rest of the assembly, offering more precise control over individual inputs. This mode is ideal for navigating menus and steering Pac-Man through mazes.

DISC WHIRLED
Give it a twist and the diagonals rise up to join the cross, creating a (somewhat) smooth, disc-shaped surface for your thumb-gliding enjoyment. This can help when inputting smooth gliding motions, as in fighting games.

PAX PRIME 2010

Come to Seattle, play some games, and wear your favorite costume. Welcome to PAX!

@GAMER WAS IN FULL EFFECT IN THE CONSOLE FREE-PLAY AREA

Photos: Barb Finnin

There have been many gamer-oriented events held through the years, but few have generated much in the way of consumer attendance. One of the most amazing exceptions is the Penny Arcade Expo, which spawned from one of the most successful game-related online comics.

PAX—now in its seventh year—was held in Seattle in early September, and @GAMER was there to take it in. The three-day festival was another success, giving many gamers a first hands-on with forthcoming titles such as *Duke Nukem Forever* (yes, finally), the next installment of Mortal Kombat, and Splash Damage's highly anticipated Brink. Last year's PAX boasted more than 60,000 attendees and it's estimated that this year's was twice as big! We waded through the software demos, booth babes, PR people, and crowds of enthusiastic fans to bring you some highlights.

Last year's PAX boasted more than 60,000 attendees...

Nicely Done Some costumes, like this *Katamari* character, were pretty awesome

1.21 Gigawatts?! *@GAMER* Editor-in-Chief Will O'Neal prepares to go back in time.

Music Games
Music titles, like *Power Gig: Rise of the Six String*, were all the rage at PAX.

BEWARE OF BIG, ANGRY DUDES WITH HUGE SWORDS

Hands-on
PAX Prime attendees got to get some hands-on time with *Fallout: New Vegas*.

Booth Babes
Much like E3, PAX had its fair share of booth babes.

01 JUST DANCE 2
The Ubisoft booth was a hit with folks lining up to show off their moves.

02 SAY CHEESE
One of the few places where you can safely walk around with fake weapons and not worry about cops.

03 BEAN BAGS
PAX is an all-day event. Thankfully, event organizers had bean bags on all of the floors, so you could rest those weary feet.

04 WHAT UP, SAMUS?
Comic-book and videogame artists were a big hit at PAX.

EVENTS

YOU CAN'T MISS!

▼ How about some red carpet action? Celebrities were also excited about *Halo: Reach*.

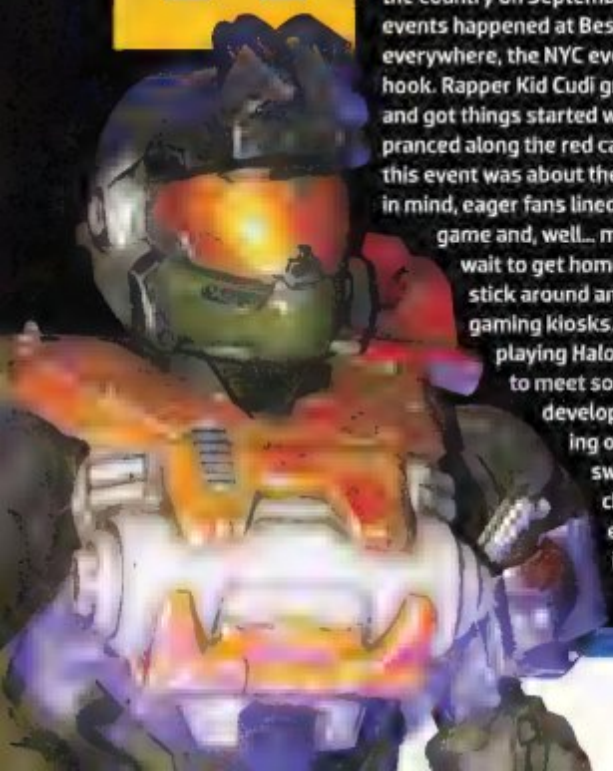
Best Buy's Halo: Reach Midnight Opening

There are midnight openings and then there's the midnight opening for *Halo: Reach*, arguably one of the most highly anticipated shooters of 2010. Best Buy held midnight openings all over the country on September 14th. While events happened at Best Buy locations everywhere, the NYC event was off the hook. Rapper Kid Cudi grabbed the mic and got things started while celebrities pranced along the red carpet. Of course, this event was about the game. With that in mind, eager fans lined up to buy the game and, well... many couldn't even wait to get home and decided to stick around and try it out on the gaming kiosks. In addition to playing *Halo: Reach*, fans got to meet some of the game's developers before making off with some *Halo* swag. Be sure to check out our calendar for upcoming events.

▶ **Music and games**
What more could fans have asked for? Okay, tacos.

▼ **Energy swords**
One of the more awesome weapons, fans scored inflatable energy swords.

NEEDLESS TO SAY THE FANS WERE FIRED UP



SPIKE TV'S GEOFF KEIGHLEY AND 343'S FRANK O'CONNOR

▲ Fans of the *Halo* franchise clamored to get some gear.

▲ GOT MY BLUE SHIRT! Another happy *Halo* fan scores some swag.

▼ Kid Cudi was on hand to get the crowd good and hyped up.

▲ Gamers couldn't wait to get home to play *Reach*.

▲ Best Buy's *Halo: Reach* event was sponsored by Mountain Dew. Of course.

▲ The team at Bungie sends the last of their *Halo* babies out into the world. Fly, little bird, fly.

FUN WITH NIKOLE Z

LET'S DISH!

@GAMER's resident girl about town dishes about Capcom's *Dead Rising 2* antics, hot new games, and undead survival tips.

This Month I Saw

Dead Rising 2 Party

Capcom loves to throw parties for its fans, so they're almost always open to the public. The recent *Dead Rising 2* party had a line out the front door, but don't worry, I cased the joint and discovered an easily shattered skylight. The event was set up like a hardware store, complete with power tools and household items, because in *Dead Rising 2* you need to combine items together to make the ultimate zombie killing weapons. The party had AK-47 teddy bears, boxing gloves with dynamite attached, and even a wheelchair mounted with machine guns. Videogame art exhibitor **i am 8-bit** organized the event and went all out, renting real weapons, rocket launchers and chainsaws for guests to play with. *Dead Rising 2* gaming kiosks were set up all along the wall, and there was a line to play each one. Nothing brings people together quite like automatic weapons and zombies.

◂ Dangerous? [L] We're pretty sure she's not holding one of those correctly.

◂ Deterrent [R] You'd best think twice before taking her parking spot.

TOP 5

HERE ARE THE TOP FIVE GAMES THAT ARE OCCUPYING MY TIME THIS MONTH:

05.
Super Scribblenauts (DS)
Super Scribblenauts one-ups the critically praised original puzzler. A better level editor and the ability to modify objects with adjectives challenges your ability to think outside the box.

04.
Medal of Honor (Xbox 360, PS3, PC)
This shooter takes place in Afghanistan, and you play different roles throughout the game. EA even hired consultants from the U.S. military to make sure this game was realistic.

03.
Rock Band 3 (Xbox 360, PS3, Wii, DS)
Yes, another Rock Band game. Chances are you already own a version, but you don't own the new keyboard peripheral! Rock Band 3 is all about the ivory (plastic) keys. The game has upgrades, vocal harmonization and Pro mode, which is akin to playing a real guitar or bass.

02.
Kirby's Epic Yarn (Wii)
Regular yarn is boring, but Kirby's yarn? It's epic. Kirby's Epic Yarn is a return to everything you loved about the Kirby series. Kirby now moves through beautiful fabric worlds by swinging a whip.

01.
Star Wars: The Force Unleashed 2 (Xbox 360, PS3, Wii, DS, PC)
Starkiller is back, and this time he's stronger with the force. Force Unleashed 2 picks up where the last left off, which might be hard to believe if you recall what happened there.

Tips and Tricks: Embrace the Zombie

There's nothing new about the inclusion of zombies in videogames. The walking dead make for obvious game characters, what with their single-minded AI and tendency to be cannon fodder. Games like *Dead Rising*, *Left 4 Dead*, and *Resident Evil* were good, but left a lot of gamers burnt out. But don't write off the shuffling horde just yet. This fall we'll see some zombie games that aren't what you'd expect.

Take the rhythm game *Rock of the Dead*. The zombies are invading and it's up you, your guitar, and the power of rock to save the world. Intense, right? Another somewhat unusual zombie game is Activision's Blood Drive, in which you'll rely on your vehicular prowess to survive a zombie horde. Finally *Plants vs. Zombies*, already a hit on PC, Mac, iPhone, iPad, and XBLA, suggests that the key to zombie control is strategically planting a lawn. Who'd have thought?

KNOW YOUR FOE
Zombies can be recognized by their grayish pallor, awkward shambling, and hopelessly outdated business attire.

Def Jam RAPSTAR
THE WORLD IS YOUR STAGE
defjamrapstar.com
I AM THE BEAST.
FEED ME RAPPERS OR FEED ME BEATS.
Lil Wayne
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Mild Violence
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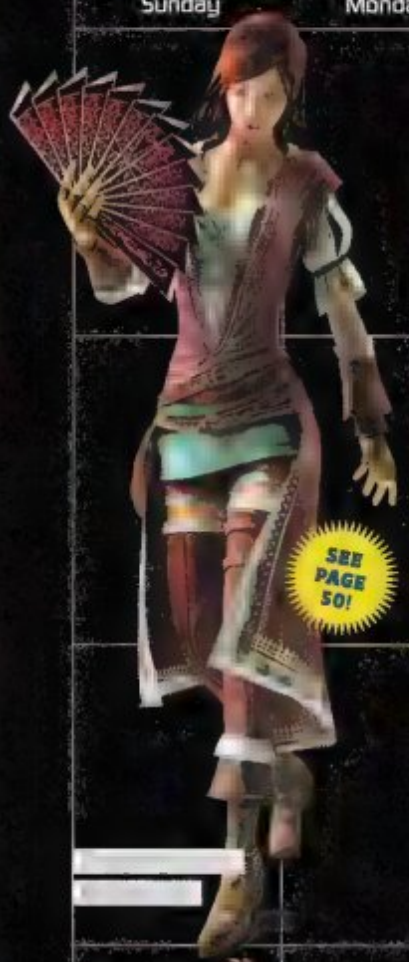
CALENDAR

NOVEMBER 2010

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
01		02 • GRAND TURISMO 5 • DRAGONBALL Z: RAGING BLAST 2 • FIRST OF THE NORTH STAR: KEN'S RAGE	03	04 • MICROSOFT KINECT • KINECTIMALS • DANCE CENTRAL • KINECT SPORTS • KINECT JOY RIDE	05 • THE @GAMER PODCAST, EPISODE 4	06
08 SEE PAGE 50!		09 • DEADLIST CATCH • CALL OF DUTY: BLACK OPS: • APACHE • BEYBLADE - METAL FUSION • MONSTER JAM 3	10 	11	12	13
15	16 • SONIC COLORS • HARRY POTTER AND THE DEATHLY HALLOWS • EA SPORTS ACTIVE 2.0 • NEED FOR SPEED: HOT PURSUIT • ASSASSIN'S CREED: BROTHERHOOD • PAC-MAN: 30TH ANNIVERSARY PARTY • THE SLY COLLECTION		17	18	19 • THE @GAMER PODCAST, EPISODE 5	20
21 • UDRAW DOOD'S BIG ADVENTURE • UDRAW PICTIONARY • DONKEY KONG COUNTRY RETURNS	22	23 • HOT WHEELS: TRACK ATTACK • MICHAEL JACKSON THE EXPERIENCE • BATTLE OF GIANTS: DINOSAUR STRIKE • TANGLED • SPLATTERHOUSE • MAJIN AND THE FORSAKEN KINGDOM	24 SEE PAGE 68!	25 THANKSGIVING	26 SEE PAGE 24! 	27
28	29 • GOLDEN SUN: DARK DAWN	30 • EPIC MICKEY				



EVENTS

BEST BUY

MIDNIGHT OPENINGS:

MICROSOFT KINECT LAUNCH (select stores): November 4

CALL OF DUTY BLACK OPS: November 9

ASSASSIN'S CREED: BROTHERHOOD: November 16

Doors open at 12:01 a.m.

Make sure to get in line Monday night for Call of Duty: Black Ops and Assassin's Creed: Brotherhood, and Wednesday night for the Kinect!

Check www.bestbuy.com/gamingevents to confirm store locations

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XBOX 360 XBOX LIVE PS3 Disney

TEEN T
Fantasy Violence
Mild Suggestive Themes
ESRB CONTENT RATING www.esrb.org

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Featured Game:

EPIC'S THE WORD

It's not really a game (yet), but Epic Citadel is definitely an exciting preview of what's to come.

EPIC CITADEL

Free
Epic Games, Electronic Arts, epicgames.com

Seen on stage at Apple's special music event in September, Epic Citadel shows off Epic Games' Unreal Engine 3 running on iOS 4. It's basically a tech demo, a preview of a still-under-wraps game to come later. But it's a free download, and your jaw will drop as you explore the lushly detailed, fully 3D world. It's also great for bragging rights—show it off to your friends so they can see what the iPad can really do. Plus, it's a Universal app that also runs on the third- and fourth-gen iPod touch, iPhone 4, and iPhone 3GS. An immersive first-person view combined with realistic textures and lighting makes you feel like you're walking around inside a movie. If this is just the engine, we can't wait to play the actual game.

You know that Apple's gaming platforms are serious business when Epic ports its Unreal tech to 'em.

Featured Games:

DON'T BREAK THE BANK

These iPad games aren't all free, but they're not that tough on your wallet.

BUILT ON THE FANCY UNITY GAME ENGINE, *AIRATTACK HD* IS A STUNNER OF A SHOOTER

The rotation feature sets *AF3* apart from *PQ*.

AURORA FEINT 3

Free
Aurora Feint, aurorafeint3.com

Aping the *Puzzle Quest* concept, *Aurora Feint 3* features three battles against AI enemies for experience points. Blocks appear gradually in a grid, and you can drag them left or right. Rotating your iPad changes the direction they're falling, which can open up new moves when you're stuck. After each victory you can spend gold on powerful special attacks, and leveling up lets you deal more damage. Addiction, ho!

This is one HD game that lives up to the term.

AIRATTACK HD

$0.99
Art In Games, artingames.com

Built on the fancy Unity game engine, *AirAttack HD* is a stunner of a top-down combat shooter. Four control schemes (touch, tilt, joystick, and relative tilt) provide plenty of options, and it automatically saves your progress at the checkpoints. Plus, it's simply gorgeous. You'll want to stop and admire the dense 3D environments and even the graceful flight formations of your enemies, but you won't be able to stop shooting, dodging fire, and gobbling power-ups.

The gameplay's a lot simpler than the title.

N.O.V.A. - NEAR ORBIT VANGUARD ALLIANCE HD

$6.99
Gameloft, gameloft.com

N.O.V.A. packs a ton of content into a $7 FPS, with a 13-level single-player game across five space-themed environments, plus local and online Deathmatch with up to four players on five maps. Three control schemes, a well-crafted story, a forgiving learning curve, and smooth graphics please. If the camera were a little easier to control while shooting it'd be perfect.

Why do ninjas climb a tree? Because it's there.

NINJATOWN: TREES OF DOOM! HD

$2.99
Venan Entertainment, venanarcade.com

Based on Shawnimals' adorable Ninjatown characters, *Trees of Doom* is an arcadey climbing game where your black-pajamaed killer scoots up a pair of trees, leaping acrobatically to avoid obstacles and snatch power-ups. Mushrooms let you slingshot your ninja ever higher. Endless and timed modes provide tons of addictive, adorable fun.

A pistol? Really? For freakin' dinosaurs?

CARNIVORES: DINOSAUR HUNTER

$2.99
Tatem Games, tatemgames.com

Carnivores: Dinosaur Hunter is basically an FPS for shootin' dinos. Stalk 15 dinosaurs across five open 3D environments, with a map and radar to help you find them. Hunting mode keeps you on the offensive, but in Survival mode it's kill or be eaten. Pay attention to the wind direction so they don't get your scent, and tempt them into your trap with a sweet dinosaur call. (Just make sure it's not a mating call.)

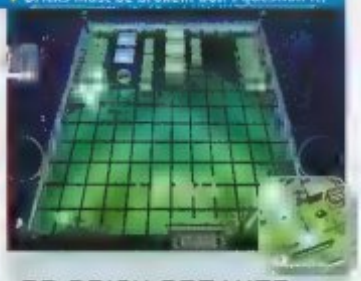
Uh-oh. Our money was on the Chimpions.

WORMS HD

$4.99
Team17 Software, team17.com

What's a game platform without a version of the hilarious turn-based strategy classic *Worms*? Thankfully we'll never have to find out. This version has bright cartoony graphics, four-player multiplayer, and more style and charm than you can shake an annelid at. While it could use a bit more polish in the controls—this would make it seem less like a simple port of the iPhone version—the *Worms* gameplay that you know and love is here in abundance.

Bricks must be broken. Don't question it.



3D BRICK BREAKER REVOLUTION 2 HD

$4.99
Digital Chocolate, digitalchocolate.com

This 3D *Breakout*-style arcade game has a 99-level classic mode featuring five boss battles, as well as a Revolution mode that goes on forever. The music is awful, but you can pump your own iTunes tracks instead. Swipe and touch controls let you play your favorite way, and you'll have to scramble as power-ups rain from above. All told, a decent *Arkanoid* wannabe.

Multitudes of Mysteries!

CHEAP GAMES

10 PUZZLE GAMES

THE IPAD'S TOUCH AND TILT CONTROLS CAN BE A LITTLE HIT-OR-MISS FOR ACTION GAMES. BUT THEY'RE PERFECT FOR PUZZLERS. THIS MONTH WE'VE SELECTED 10 PUZZLE GAMES THAT SHOULD KEEP YOUR NOODLER NOODLING.

01 **PUZZLE AGENT HD** $6.99, telltalegames.com
Telltale's point-and-click mystery has a dark *X-Filesy* story and the art stylings of cartoonist Graham Annable. And, of course, tons of ingenious puzzles.

02 **SPINBALLS HD** $2.99, spinballs.com
You've got 42 colored balls on seven discs, and you spin them to match up the colors. The techno soundtrack is grating, but you can substitute your own tunes. Also, the title is really fun to say.

03 **ARRIVING HD** $4.99, chlova.com
These gravity-based puzzles get tricky fast, with you frantically drawing and erasing lines to guide a dinosaur egg. Solving each of the 28 levels is supremely satisfying.

04 **PAC-CHAIN** $4.99, namcogames.com
Send Pac-Man careening around a grid of ghosts, trying to gobble them before they reach the top by tapping like-colored groups. It's fast-paced and tense, and may make you hungry.

05 **NO, HUMAN** $1.99, vol-2.com
Bright graphics, sarcastic captions, and cosmic fireballs—what more could you want in a physics puzzler? If you said, "a native iPhone version too," you're in luck.

06 **ZENTOMINO HD** free, littlewhitebearstudios.com
This twist on a pentomino game challenges you to fit 12 puzzle pieces into a larger shape. Aimed at relaxation, it lacks a timer or even a score.

07 **SLICE IT!** $0.99, global.com2us.com
Slicing shapes into equal parts will test your math skills, the steadiness of your drawing finger, and your idea of what makes a great puzzle game. Slice it! gets extra points for originality.

08 **TANZEN HD** $2.99, littlewhitebearstudios.com
Can you slide the seven puzzle pieces into the shaded area without any overlapping? You get 500-plus levels for a mere $3.

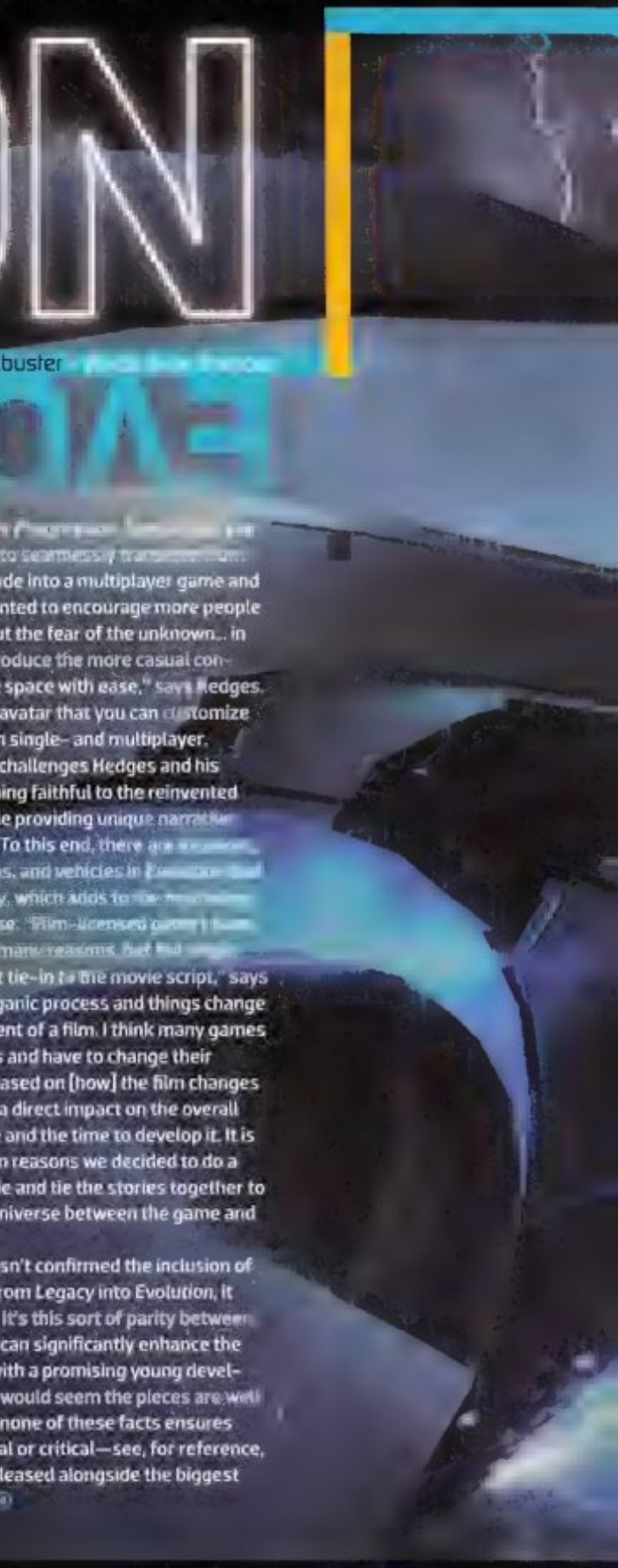
09 **AQUEDUCT** $2.99, kiefferbros.com
Half sliding-tile puzzle, half *Pipe Mania*-style circuit completion. Aqueduct's 190-plus puzzles ramp up quickly in difficulty, and you can play on iPad or iPhone.

10 **BLOCK MANIA HD** $2.99, spotka.com
These clever, addicting puzzles have you sliding your block-head character around a grid, using the environment to keep him from flying right off the board. This is life-or-death stuff.

TRON

Disney hopes to create a worthy companion to its upcoming blockbuster

EVOLUTION



"It's a Holy Grail with a massive cult following, and something that we know the *TRON* fans have high expectations [for]," says Darren Hedges, game director of Disney's *TRON: Evolution*. "I'm not sure though why it's taken so long to approach the license from the standpoint of an AAA game," he continues, suggesting that perhaps the technology would have failed to do the *TRON* world justice before now. Indeed, it's a question we've asked ourselves many times; "holy grail" is a rather accurate description of the *TRON* license, as evidenced by the hype surrounding this year's holiday blockbuster movie release. Hedges, however, is confident that his team's game will meet expectations—despite the pressure to release directly alongside the film. "We knew the window we had to hit and looked at the feature set and game we wanted to make, and then scheduled the project to make the best experience possible."

An action-adventure game at its core, *Evolution* incorporates both third-person, *Prince of Persia*-style combat and acrobatics alongside light cycle racing segments. The story bridges the time period between the old and new films, chronicling a series of major events that lead up to the release of *TRON: Legacy*. You control a program created by Jeff Bridges' character Kevin Flynn, to help him uncover a lurking conspiracy.

"We really wanted to keep the player moving at all times," says Hedges. "So we looked at a number of styles of movement and combat styles we could use to build the game. We talked to the filmmakers to see what they were doing with their combat ... and came across the perfect blend of Parkour and Capoeira." There's definitely a synergy: The two styles blend easily into one another for smooth environmental movement and combat.

One unique feature of *Evolution* is called Persistent Character [illegible] tions will allow you to seamlessly transition the offline story mode into a multiplayer game and back again. "We wanted to encourage more people to get online without the fear of the unknown... in this way we can introduce the more casual consumer to the online space with ease," says Hedges. You'll have a single avatar that you can customize and use across both single- and multiplayer.

One of the core challenges Hedges and his team face is remaining faithful to the reinvented world of *TRON*, while providing unique narrative and visual content. To this end, there are [illegible] characters, weapons, and vehicles in [illegible] will not be in *Legacy*, which adds to the [illegible] of the *TRON* universe. "Film-licensed games [illegible] had challenges for many reasons, but the biggest is the direct tie-in to the movie script," says Hedges. "It is an organic process and things change over the development of a film. I think many games get caught with this and have to change their stories and levels based on [how] the film changes over time. This has a direct impact on the overall quality of the game and the time to develop it. It is also one of the main reasons we decided to do a prequel to the movie and tie the stories together to create a cohesive universe between the game and the movie."

While Disney hasn't confirmed the inclusion of Daft Punk's score from *Legacy* into *Evolution*, it would make sense. It's this sort of parity between game and film that can significantly enhance the final product, and with a promising young developer at the helm, it would seem the pieces are well in place. Of course, none of these facts ensures success, commercial or critical—see, for reference, Ubisoft's *Avatar*, released alongside the biggest movie of all time.

The player controls Anon, which is short for "Anonymous", a choice made by the developer to allow players to personify the character for themselves.

YOU'LL HAVE A CUSTOM AVATAR YOU CAN USE IN BOTH SINGLE- AND MULTIPLAYER

▲ The visual splendor of the *TRON* universe makes for some impressive vistas.

CREATIVE INSPIRATION

When developing *TRON: Evolution*, the Propaganda team looked at gobs of other games—not just for inspiration, says Hedges, but to determine the "best of breed" in terms of what they were trying to create. He says that although no game currently does what *TRON* is doing, *Devil May Cry 4*, *Mirrors Edge*, *God of War*, *Assassin's Creed*, *Mario Galaxy*, and *Prince of Persia* were all primary sources.

VISUAL SPLENDOR

Disney gave the developer access to all of its TRON assets (both new and old) to ensure an authentic experience.

MULTIMEDIA

Everyone Together Now

"We worked directly with the film team from before shooting began," says Hedges. "The collaboration has really been one of mutual understanding. The guys are also games players and took an active part in helping us define our story and style." Hedges recalls the early meetings. "We talked with the filmmakers and said, 'You guys have a great story in *Legacy*, but we would like to tell a different story—one that complements yours.'" They worked up a "chronology and mythology" doc spanning from 1982 to 2010. "In that process we came across a series of events that rocked the *TRON* universe to its core," says Hedges. "We looked at this and decided that this [was] what we want to build a game around." To maintain parity, assets, artwork, and models were shared between productions, to ensure a consistent look and feel across the two.

A VERITABLE FEAST FOR THE EYES \\

01 COMBAT...
...revolves around using *TRON*'s iconic light disc, reinvented for the modern era.

02 BASIC...
...attacks include throws and melee strikes involving the disc, the latter of which can be seen in action above.

03 SHOULDER...
...buttons are used for blocking and dashing–each of which modifies the basic attacks for counters and aerial attacks.

04 TO GET OUT...
...of Dodge? Hold the left trigger to wall run, then jump, grapple, and swing from objects.

THE THIRD DIMENSION

TRON: Evolution, much like its cinematic counterpart, will be embracing 3D technology. "We worked with the theatrical team and looked at what they are doing for the film's 3D techniques," says Hedges. "They have a brand new way of doing 3D and we learned a lot of lessons from them."

Evolution is staying away from "gimmicky" 3D, whereby objects are thrown into the scene just to emphasize the effect. "We looked at the world and gave it depth, so that the user feels like they are in the game world and not just having the effect for the effect's sake."

XBOX 360 PS3 PC Wii

GAME DETAILS

RATING PENDING RP

TRON: EVOLUTION

INFO
Publisher: Disney
Developer: Propaganda Games
Platforms: Xbox 360, PS3, Wii, PC

MULTIPLAYER/ONLINE
Yes

GENRE
Action-adventure

RELEASE DATE
December 7, 2010

SUITABLE FOR
Futurists, light cyclists, neon enthusiasts

NOT OUT YET? PLAY THIS!

If you can still find it, check out *TRON 2.0* for Xbox, PC, or Mac. This fun FPS from 2004 was billed as a sequel to the original movie.

WHAT'S GREAT:
- Stunning visuals match their cinematic legacy
- Good variety of gameplay styles and mechanics
- Light Cycles

WHAT'S NOT SO GREAT:
- Light Cycle controls aren't quite there yet
- Still no confirmation on Daft Punk soundtrack

GRAN TURISMO 5

Polyphony's latest addition to the GT series isn't raising the racing game bar. It's taking off and nuking it from orbit • Words: Jaz Rignall

▼ Race against up to 16 other players in multiplayer online events or host a game to put your friends to the test.

It seems that civilizations have risen and fallen in the time it's taken Polyphony to create its latest generation of the venerable Gran Turismo series. But, finally, after long last, version five of the world's greatest racing game is ready to rip the asphalt.

So what took so long? Playing it will answer that question. GT5 packs more features, cars, and detail than any racing game before it. Everything else is going to be eating its dust.

First, it packs in over 1,000 cars representing the entire automotive spectrum. There are the highest of high-end supercars from marques such as Lamborghini and Ferrari, new concept cars, unusual cars such as the Tesla roadster and a WWII kübelwagen, and everyday vehicles such as the Prius. There are also custom cars, racing cars, classics, and muscle cars. From a VW Bus to a Le Mans version of Citroen's unbelievable GT concept, this game has pretty much everything you can think of. And a lot that you won't.

Not only are there vast amounts of cars, they look amazing. And I mean absolutely knockout. Some cars are better than others—less time has been spent on the more mundane vehicles—but the high-end cars are without a doubt the best real-time models I've seen in any game anywhere. In particular, the '60s classic racing cars with mid-mounted engines that can be seen through the rear windows are just mind-boggling. Engine plumbing, wiring, engine block detailing, mesh grating—the fetishistic, obsessive detail in the modeling borders on the insane.

And then there are the racing modes. Gran Turismo 5 features both NASCAR and WRC gameplay, as well as an enormous array of

AUTO EXOTICA

Whatever your automotive taste, GTS will have something to tickle your fancy. Every class of car you can think of is represented. And classes of cars you probably won't even think of are also represented. The game features gorgeous cars from throughout history, presented in glorious detail that will have you proudly photographing your favorites using the in-game photo mode.

THE FETISHISTIC, OBSESSIVE DETAIL IN THE MODELING BORDERS ON THE INSANE.

phenomenally realistic real-world and specially designed tracks. You can race against AI drivers yourself (A-Spec mode), go online and challenge up to 16 real people, and you can even manage teams of AI drivers (B-Spec mode), dictating their styles and strategies.

Add in real-time weather effects, crash damage, and plenty more features that I don't have the space to write about and you have what is without a doubt the ultimate virtual playground for racing fans. This is going to keep racing fans engrossed for years.

▲ MIND-BOGGLING DETAIL
The modeling on the premium cars is simply incredible. The detail will astonish you.

PS3

GAME DETAILS

GRAN TURISMO 5

INFO
Publisher: Sony
Developer: Polyphony Digital
Platforms: PS3

MULTIPLAYER/ONLINE
Up to 16 players

GENRE
Racing

RELEASE DATE
November 2, 2010

SUITABLE FOR
Car connoisseurs looking for a realistic approach to racing

NOT OUT YET? PLAY THIS!

A great way to get yourself ready for GT5 is to check out GT5: *Prologue*. It's the perfect aper-etif for the main course, and will help you get up to speed on your GT racing basics.

WHAT'S GREAT:
- Real-time wear and tear will now be visible on the body of the car in addition to the internal damage seen in previous *GT* titles
- An estimated 1,000 cars are up for grabs, the largest selection to date

WHAT'S NOT SO GREAT:
- The game is so big, only the most dedicated players will see all of it
- Waiting for it

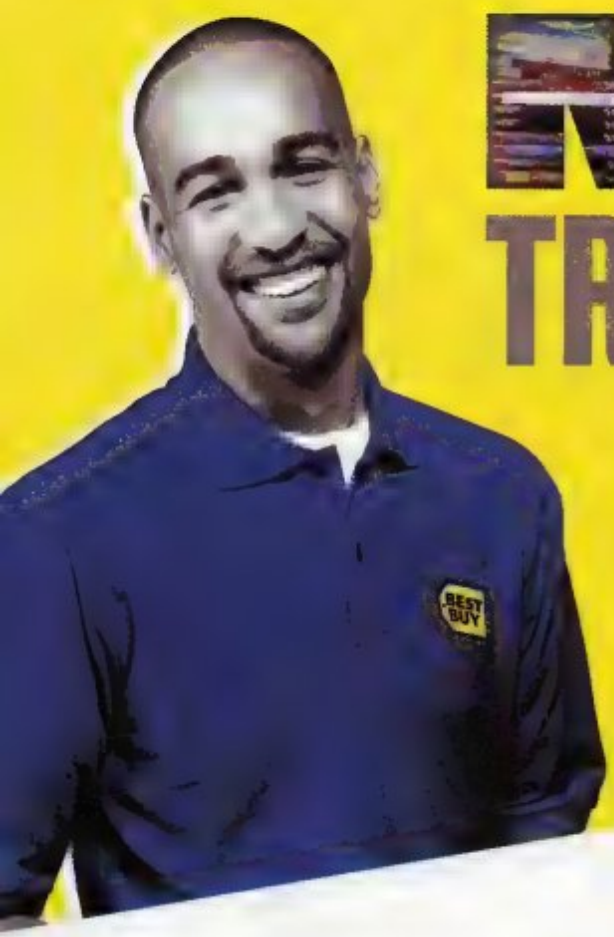
▼ *Gran Turismo 5* lets you relive your moments of glory as many times as you see fit and even upload them to YouTube.

RACE ALL DAY

▲ Night falls... in real time. The astonishing lighting and weather effects add unprecedented realism.

▲ **PROLOGUE EPILOGUE**
Can't quite give up your beloved Mitsubishi Lancer Evolution IX GSR that's sitting in your *Gran Turismo 5 Prologue* garage? There's no need for heartache. GT5 allows you to import your car collection from *Prologue*, so you can use them to tear up the tracks in Arcade Mode.

AROUND THE WORLD



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WORLD OF WARCRAFT: CATACLYSM

It's the end of the world (of Warcraft) as we know it. Earthquakes. Volcanoes. C[illegible]nd dogs living together! • Words: Jaz Rignall

Since its launch in November 2004, World of Warcraft has gone from strength to strength, becoming one of the most successful and celebrated gaming franchises of all time. It's easy to see why millions of players have leveled their highly personalized characters through its vast and varied lands: WoW constantly evolves its gameplay with regular content updates and expansion packs that advance the game's many epic storylines, add new quests, places, and dungeons to explore, and, most importantly, add phat lewts galore (that's WoW-speak for shiny treasure)!

So what's new for WoW this time around? Well, the big news is that while the previous two expansions added whole new landmasses to explore, Cataclysm is actually based in the original lands of Azeroth. This isn't quite the drawback it may sound like, however. To cut a very long story short, the Cataclysm expansion is built on a simple premise: a phenomenally powerful and supremely evil dragon called Deathwing, who has been trapped under Azeroth for the better part of an eternity, has found a way to dig himself out. And, after being trapped in a stinky hole for eons, he's not bringing cupcakes—just oodles of death and destruction. So expect earthquakes, volcanoes, and tsunamis for starters; flambéed gluteus maximus d'Azeroth for the main course; and for dessert, it's your head on a stick.

Yes! Deathwing is ripping apart World of Warcraft's original lands. So while you might recognize some of the places where your characters grew up during the original game, most parts will be scorched, flooded, collapsed, or sitting at the bottom of a huge, smoking crater. Fun times!

But while your favorite zone might be mashed to bits, things aren't all bad. You can admire the devastation from a flying mount high above the ground—after six years, you'll finally be able to take wing and fly over the Eastern Kingdoms and Kalimdor. Which is handy, really, because Deathwing's destruction has opened up a whole new bunch of previously inaccessible zones. Until you get to a higher level you won't really want to go there on foot, because you'll get eaten by all the new high-level monsters that live there.

Yes, that's more good news. Or bad, if you hate leveling. The new level cap is 85, and getting there takes a lot of questing and dungeon-crawling. Lucky, then, Cataclysm is packed with a ton of new content to help you get there. And even when you finally hit the highest level, as any seasoned WoW player knows, that isn't the end of the game: It's the beginning of the end-game, where tons of new dungeons, raid instances, and rated battlegrounds await to challenge you and your guild-dwelling mates.

AFTER BEING TRAPPED IN A STINKY HOLE FOR EONS, DEATHWING'S NOT BRINGING CUPCAKES

BEFORE AND AFTER

In Cataclysm, the original lands of the World of Warcraft are being completely transformed by the eponymous disaster. This has enabled the designers to go back and totally rework the game's many, many zones not only cosmetically, but from a gameplay point of view, too. This means the entire leveling process from 1–60 for both factions has been streamlined, clunky old quests have been removed, and the storylines have been tightened up. This is great news for old players—leveling up a character is now fun again—but also for new players, who will hopefully find the whole process much more intuitive and fun than it was in the past.

▲ AFTER

GOBLINS AND WORGEN: TWO NEW PLAYABLE RACES

Cataclysm is introducing two new playable races to WoW's two opposing factions, the Horde and the Alliance. For the Horde there are the Goblins,the most enterprising and mechanically adept race in Azeroth. Expect them to bring all sorts of new mechanical wonders and a great sense of humor to the game. The Alliance will be joined by the Worgen, a race of werewolves who've sequestered themselves away for many years, but who have returned to the outside world thanks to the cataclysm.

DROWNING IN NEW CONTENT

INTRODUCING WOW'S FIRST UNDERWATER ZONE

▲ Welcome to Vashj'ir, a new underwater zone where you can quest and take a bath at the same time. Just what some *WoW* players need!

PC

GAME DETAILS

HANDS-ON

WORLD OF WARCRAFT: CATACLYSM

INFO
Publisher: Blizzard
Developer: Blizzard
Platforms: PC, Mac

MULTIPLAYER/ONLINE
Massively multiplayer

GENRE
MMORPG

RELEASE DATE
December 7th, 2010

SUITABLE FOR
Would-be adventurers willing to invest hours a week over a very long period of time

BEST BUY

Preorder Exclusive
Bonus points for members who preorder

NOT OUT YET? PLAY THIS!

World of Warcraft: Wrath of the Lich King: Get up to speed on WoW by playing the current expansion. And get to see the original Azeroth before it all gets blown to smithereens!

WHAT'S GREAT:
- Total overhaul of the old world with lots of new zones and refined leveling process
- Two new playable characters, major tweaks to all classes

WHAT'S NOT SO GREAT:
- After six years, we're still having to put up with gold-selling spammers and scammers

◀ Ground mounts? Pffft. *Cataclysm* lets you finally take to the skies over Azeroth.

▲ Cataclysm's new rated battlegrounds offer a whole new way to acquire PvP gear. And a whole new avenue for grief drama when things don't quite go as planned...

PVPERS REJOICE!

If you like to test your mettle in combat against other players, you'll love Cataclysm's completely new rated battlegrounds system, which lets organized groups of PvPers compete against one other. All-new PvP-oriented items and titles can be won if you're successful.

CATACLYSM: NOW WITH LESS TALENTS

One of Cataclysm's most surprising features is the new talent system, which simplifies each class's talent tree by removing a lot of the existing choices. After two expansions' worth of bloat, the designers wanted to take talent trees back to basics, stripping out what they thought were the non-fun and gimmicky talents, and adding in ones that make the game more enjoyable. So far, we really like what we see – it's definitely an improvement. Sometimes less is more!

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01 SHAUN WHITE SKATEBOARDING

Moving from waxed board to wheeled board, the animal of the snowy mountains lends his talents to help you dominate the concrete jungle. Use rails, fountains, bowls, and the city itself to pull off wicked tricks and stunning combos and bring light and life back to the dull, colorless city. Use the experience gained from completing tricks, challenges, and mission to customize your character from head to board. Go it alone or with skateboarders from across the globe and shape the city into your utopian dream. Kick the dust from your board, knock the rust from your trucks, and hit the streets.

SEE PAGE 78

02 EA SPORTS MMA

Getting in a fight can be a scary thing. Getting in a fight with Randy Couture is even scarier. However, thanks to *MMA* you can go toe to toe with mixed martial arts greats like Frank Shamrock and Dan Henderson, all without losing any teeth. Work your way through a career while you train around the globe with top superstars like Pat Miletich, Rickson Gracie, and Bas Rutten, who will all use their own discrint style and fight just like their real-life counterparts. Lining up a big grudge match against one of your friends? Use EA SPORTS Live Broadcast to create a hype video, and have your fight broadcast live with live commentary calling every move!

03 SID MEIER'S CIVILIZATION V

Unleash your inner Caesar as you build the ultimate empire and test your strategic muscle. Forge your civilization's destiny as you expand its borders and guide its research, diplomacy, economy, and government. The new hexagon tile layout and ranged bombardment firing create vast new tactical possibilities and push the limits of strategic sanity. Customize gameplay with the modding tools as you wage war against the computer and people around the globe. Lead your people through the ages and be the first to reach space.

SEE PAGE 74

04 FIFA SOCCER 11

If you're looking to get your fill of World Cup-caliber soccer action without the constant blare of the nightmare-inducing vuvuzela, check out *FIFA Soccer 11*. With the introduction of Personality+, which sees individual abilities reflected in the game, and the pro passing system, which lets you more delicately direct where your passes go, you'll be in more control than ever before. Now, take your skills to the improved career mode and work through a massive 15-year career, all while receiving instant feedback through the upgraded status system. Go forth, and bleed your team's colors!

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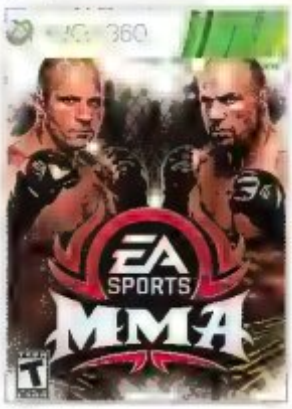

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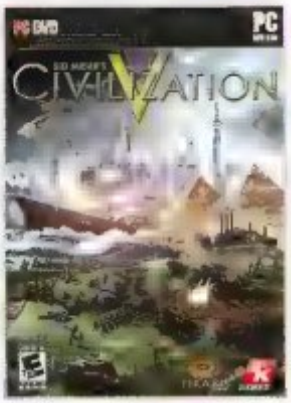

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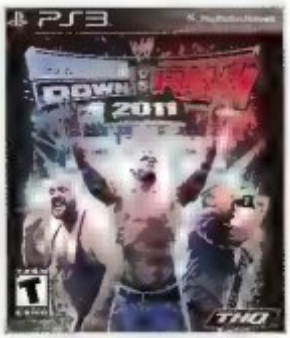

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05 WWE SMACKDOWN VS. RAW 2011

Chokeslam, bodyslam, and piledrive your way down the Road to Wrestlemania. Choose from over 70 WWE Superstars to beat the odds and take home the Championship Title. Use unsurpassed customization and creation tools to design your superstar's finishing moves, personality, and even their storyline. Become the master of the WWE Universe by customizing storylines, feuds, and the programming schedule to develop drama and action. Visit backstage with your Superstar companions and talk to the commissioner. Then step back into the ring, if you dare.

06 SUPER STREET FIGHTER IV

Return to the streets to fight your way through the ranks in the classic 2D world of frantic martial arts action. Pit Ken against Ryu, Blanka against Balrog, or any of the original 25 characters from Street Fighter IV, along with eight other fighters returning from previous Street Fighters and Juri and Hakan, two newcomers. Crush cars and bust barrels with iron fists and steel feet as the classic mini-games return. String together uppercuts, roundhouses, EX moves, and Ultras as you combo your way to the championship, waging war against players from around the world utilizing the enhanced online matchmaking system. See you on top. HADOUKEN!

07 TRITTON AX 720 HEADSET

With its glossy white design, ultimate comfort, and fiber optic audio inputs, the Dolby Digital, Pro Logic II, and Dolby headphone technology will tackle you with its driving bass and assault you with crystalline highs. Chat with friends, strategize with teammates, and taunt your opponents using the detachable microphone and utilize the power of the independent voice and game volume control to hear what you need to hear when you need it most. Connect to Xbox Live, the PlayStation Network, and even a PC or Mac. Your games will never be the same again after experiencing the ultimate audio environment.

08 PS3 CONTROLLER

Sony's DualShock 3 controllers work great with any game type: shooters, racing, fighting, sports, RPGs, puzzle, and even action-adventure titles. The controller layout and feel really has not changed much since the original DualShock came out back in late 1997, because it hasn't had to. I really like having the rechargeable batteries built into the controller—you just charge them up with the USB slots of your PS3 and you're ready to roll! You can jazz up you room a bit by choosing controllers in black, red, white, blue, pink, and silver. Or just get them all and make your friends jealous!

NEED FOR SPEED: HOT PURSUIT

The *Burnout* folks aim to make *Hot Pursuit* a racer worth remembering • Words: Tom Price

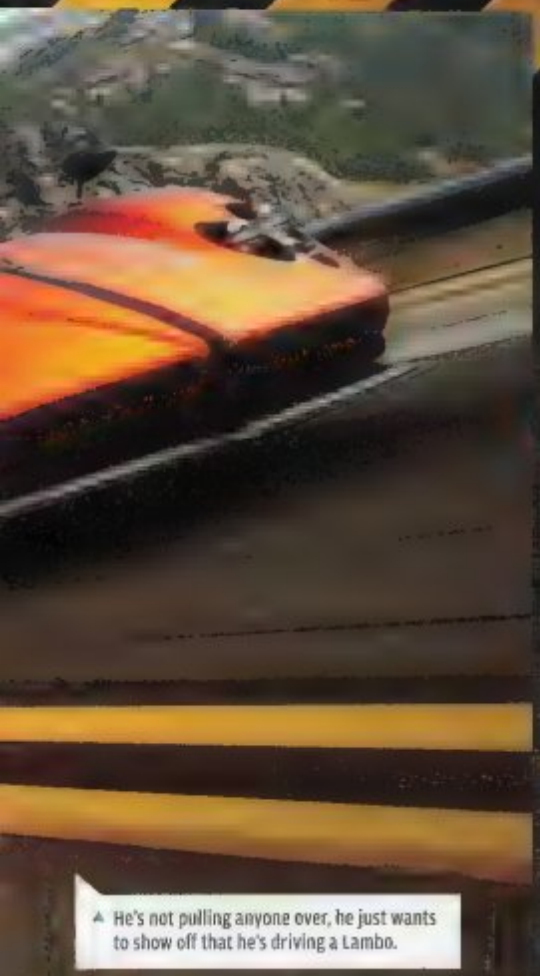
If an actual cop driving a Bugatti Veyron tried to pull me over, I think I would have to give up. Not because the Bugatti is so fast (which it is), but because a police department with the resources to put a $2 million police interceptor on the road is not one you want to mess with. Simply put, these cops would chase you to Mars, if they had to.

The police department of fictional Seacrest County—the setting of EA's new *Need for Speed: Hot Pursuit*—has a fleet of police cars that you do not want to mess with: Lamborghinis, Porsches, McLarens, and much more. But the cars you'll drive on the other side of the equation—running from the po-po—are equally impressive. The wide-open mountain roads and twisting coastal highways of Seacrest County will see some serious automotive hardware get banged up in its jurisdiction.

Since *Hot Pursuit* was developed by the same people as *Burnout*, you can fully expect this racing experience to be more about smashing and bashing at 100 mph than efficient, technical driving on a timed track. This is cops vs. speeders, with gamers getting to play both sides. So you can be the rabbit or you can be the wolf. You can also be one of many rabbits or wolves if you decide to go online, which you're probably going to want to do.

Need for Speed: Hot Pursuit looks like a welcome return to what made the series great so long ago. The *Burnout*-style gameplay, though, says that *Need for Speed* is not afraid to try something new. With some innovative new online options and a top-notch graphics engine, *Hot Pursuit* even looks as pretty as it plays.

EXPECT MORE SMASHING AND BASHING THAN TECHNICAL, TIMED DRIVING



▲ He's not pulling anyone over, he just wants to show off that he's driving a Lambo.

ROAD WARRIORS

We're pretty sure this isn't legal

SPEED IS NOT YOUR ONLY WEAPON

Simply crossing a finish line is only rarely the goal in NFS: Hot Pursuit. Rather, your job is to stop the other guy—or stop them from stopping you. Ramming is one obvious solution, and doing it Burnout-style definitely gets results. But if you really want to mess with an opponent, drop a spike strip from a chopper in front 'em. Other fun ways to screw with the other guy include road blocks, radar jamming and EMP blasts. Oh, how I wish I had that one for tailgaters.

PS3 XBOX 360 Wii PC

GAME DETAILS

NEED FOR SPEED: HOT PURSUIT

HANDS-ON

INFO
Publisher: Electronic Arts
Developer: Criterion Games
Platforms: PS3, Xbox 360, Wii, PC

MULTIPLAYER/ONLINE
1-8 players online

GENRE
Racing

RELEASE DATE
November 16, 2010

SUITABLE FOR
Scofflaw speed junkies and amateur Poncherellos alike

EVOLVING THE SERIES: AUTOLOG

NOT OUT YET? PLAY THIS!

Check out *Need for Speed: Shift*, the previous game in the NfS series that boasts nearly 70 licensed cars and more than 15 real-world locations.

WHAT'S GREAT:
- Superhot cars
- Same devs that made Burnout
- Dropping your own spike strips

WHAT'S NOT SO GREAT:
- Getting spike strips dropped on you
- "The Man" trying to slow you down
- Your commute now seems boring

DEAD SPACE 2

In space, no one can hear you scream... except in multiplayer Words: Alex Porter

Sure, the Dead Space concept hit some familiar notes in mixing parts of Resident Evil, Doom, and the Alien films, but the game also combined excellent gameplay with clever puzzles and kept us satisfyingly freaked out. Nerve-wracking sound design and raw action were nicely propelled by solid storytelling. Excellent stuff, and from the looks of things so far, Dead Space 2 ups the ante in a handful of significant ways.

Our hero, mining engineer Isaac Clark, is back and he's completely screwed. He emerges from a coma and finds himself aboard a gigantic space city know as The Sprawl, crawling with the nasty alien Necromorph species that is hell-bent on decimating the human population. Adding insult to injury, Isaac suffers dementia and visions of his slaughtered girlfriend haunt him. In short, the enemy is within and without.

LONELY NO MORE

The biggest news for Dead Space 2 is multiplayer (see sidebar). But make no mistake about it, single-player is richer, deeper, and creepier than ever and features some massive action sequences. As Isaac sets out across the huge city, he'll have new weapons and tools at his disposal. Sure, he's still got his handy mining tools such as the Hydrogen Torch Flamethrower and Supercollider Contact Beam. But you'll also be able to skewer Necromorphs against walls with the Javelin Gun and use upgraded telekinesis to turn even disembodied limbs into weapons. Your arsenal also includes some awesome trip mines, jet boots, and the ability to rip holes in the ship's hull to slurp those creatures out into space. Another unique Dead Space feature, Zero-G, is back, too. You'll engage in more free-floating combat and solve mind-melting physics-based puzzles in weightless environments. With the complex story and advanced multiplayer features, Dead Space 2 is shaping up to be Halo's darker

◀ What we wouldn't give for a line of Space Gonad merchandise to launch with the game.

"Well there's yer problem right there," said Isaac. "Yer guts are all on the outside!"

NOTHING SAYS "PARTY" LIKE FEAR, GORE, AND FRIENDS

Online multiplayer, anyone? 4v4 multiplayer is just the start. One team can play as Necromorphs, ripping apart human foes as distinctly different creatures including the Pack (a swarm of mutant children), the Puker (he vomits corrosive bile, what's not to love?), the Lurker, and the Spitter. Or, you can play on a team of humans, members of The Sprawl's security force. Each has an advanced security suit with unique upgrades to unlock and a host of customization options. Finally, multiplayer maps even have story objectives that reveal fresh details of the larger narrative.

NECROMORPHS: WHERE'D THEY COME FROM?

[redacted] and we're not entirely sure what—between the ubiquitous Church of Unitology and the [redacted] Necromorphs. First, the Church has its [redacted] and you'll see the [redacted] physical and [redacted] itionary leap [redacted] sort of rebirth by [redacted]. How these details [redacted] er, we're not sure, [redacted] you can bet we'll find out [redacted] DS2 drops.

XBOX 360 PS3 PC

GAME DETAILS

DEAD SPACE 2

HANDS-ON

INFO
Publisher: EA
Developer: Visceral Games
Platforms: Xbox 360, PS3, PC

MULTIPLAYER/ONLINE
4v4 versus and 8 player co-op

GENRE
Survival horror

RELEASE DATE
January 25, 2011

SUITABLE FOR
Fans of pant-wettingly terrifying horror, tentacle aficionados

NOT OUT YET? PLAY THIS!

Check out *Resident Evil 5*, *Dead Rising 2*, and (of course) the first Dead Space to get your blood-soaked, survival horror fix.

WHAT'S GREAT:
- Play as a necromorph in multi-player
- Breach the hull to suck enemies into spaaaaace
- Impale enemies with their own severed limbs

WHAT'S NOT SO GREAT:
- For story purists, multiplayer may spoil the solitary terror vibe

GAME DETAILS

NARUTO SHIPPUDEN: ULTIMATE NINJA STORM 2

INFO
Publisher: Namco Bandai
Developer: CyberConnect2
Platforms: Xbox 360, PS3

MULTIPLAYER/ONLINE
Two-player online

GENRE
Fighting

RELEASE DATE
October 15, 2010

SUITABLE FOR
Otaku who can't get enough of the aspiring Hokage

▲ "Epic" can't even begin to explain the large-scale action of exchanging force.

NARUTO SHIPPUDEN: ULTIMATE NINJA STORM 2

This anime fighter looks sharper than most, but how does it play? • Words: Heather Barron

Fast-paced and off the wall, Naruto is twice the ninja he was in the original *Ninja Storm*. Of course, with what seems like more than 1001 Naruto titles on the market, it can be hard to discern what's what. *Ninja Storm 2* aims to stand out by maintaining a strong focus on visual style and a character roster that's packed with fan favorites.

While characters from earlier **Naruto** titles are back, the most exciting fighter to grace the game just so happens to be foreign to the Naruto franchise. *Tekken* fans will welcome the half-Japanese, half-Swedish Lars Alexandersson, who enters the Naruto world as a bonus playable character.

Of course, this game is all about Naruto, and while playing as the title character, it was extremely fun to unleash Naruto's Ninjutsu only to summon Sakura to add insult to a rival's injury.

Ninja Storm 2 broadens the focus to encompass three different arcs in Story Mode, playing out through the eyes of Naruto, Jiraya, and Sasuke.

The over-the-top cinematics and beautifully cel-shaded artwork makes *Naruto* a visual treat. With almost double the character selection of the original *Ninja Storm* and a two-player online mode to spread the love, *Naruto* fans will want to give it a play.

TEKKEN FANS WILL WELCOME LARS, FROM TEKKEN 6

WHAT'S GREAT:
- 40 characters to choose from, including a special someone from Tekken 6
- Online Mode makes its entrance into the series

WHAT'S NOT SO GREAT:
- Button mashing gets you way too far
- The glitz and glamour of the graphics can't disguise the mediocre gameplay

ENGLISH OR JAPANESE
The audio can be adjusted to Japanese or English. We're huge fans of having the choice, especially when it means getting to listen to the vocals as originally intended instead of the sometimes-clunky English dubbing.

NOT OUT YET? TRY THIS!

Have a PSP? Try out *Naruto Shippuden: Ultimate Ninja Heroes 3*, a fighter with more than 50 playable ninjas and over 80 action-packed missions in story mode.

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LITTLEBIGPLANET 2

One thing *LBP2* has in abundance? Possibilities • Words: Ryan Thomas

"I'd say the most significant difference between the original game and *LittleBigPlanet 2* is that we give players the tools to create entire games and not just levels," says Eric Fong, the sequel's associate producer. To illustrate, Fong points to the Controlinator. In *LittleBigPlanet*, you see, you controlled Sackboy, who had to pull switches to control vehicles. In *LBP2*, however, you directly control those vehicles with said Controlinator, allowing actions to be bound to controls—vehicle movement to the thumbstick, say, or jump to the X button—giving you more nuanced interactions in the process. Indeed, the Controlinator stems from perhaps the biggest lesson Media Molecule learned with the original title: namely, that players weren't satisfied with just creating levels. they wanted to create entire games. "We've done a lot to help players realize their creative potential by giving new tools that are shortcuts to some very creative solutions," says Fong.

The *LBP2* experience has also gained a bevy of new tools, including a grappling hook, power gloves, bounce pads, and the Creatinator—a magical miner's helmet that can emit anything from napalm to cake icing. The grappling hook can be used against other characters (including those controlled by your associates), and the power gloves and Creatinator are great to turn friends into enemies.

And then there are the Sackbots, non-player characters that help connect you more directly to the gameworld. "Even though there were NPCs in [the original], I think there was a level of detachment because they were so hand-crafted," says Fong. Now, NPCs have actual voices and personalities—you can record dialogue using the PS3 headset, while physical actions can be performed (and recorded) using the Sixaxis. Gravity is also at your bidding: it's possible to adjust gravity on the fly, or just the physics of a particular object or vehicle. In a level called "Lift Off," for instance, Sackboy rides a unicycle that can completely reverse gravity, allowing him to ride on the ceiling to avoid hazards.

Where *LittleBigPlanet* effectively created its own genre, the sequel looks to expand the creative possibilities exponentially. It's a powerful tool in and of itself, and may become many a budding game designer's first chance to realize their creative vision. Or, at the very least, grab their friend's Sackboy with a grappling hook, beat them senseless with the power gloves, and then dance the Tootsie Roll above their face-down body, all to a musical reinterpretation of "Here Comes the Hammer." There are worse ways to spend a Saturday, certainly.

LittleBigButterNutter is likely delicious.

Even pinball and the like are possible game creations in *LittleBigPlanet 2*.

LITTLEBIGSYNTHESIZER

Much to its developer's surprise, players actually found a way to create a music sequencer in the original *LittleBigPlanet* using the in-level sound effects and proximity triggers. While creative, it was very cumbersome to create tunes, and so with *LBP2*, Media Molecule has designed a sequencer that lets you quickly and easily place, preview, and modify different sounds in your track. "I think this feature will allow those that are musically inclined the opportunity to really show their stuff," says Fong. "From a game-design perspective, I think being able to create new and unique tracks to help establish mood will add polish that will help levels really stand out."

We have no idea what's about to come out of that stereo, but we're guessing it's bouncy.

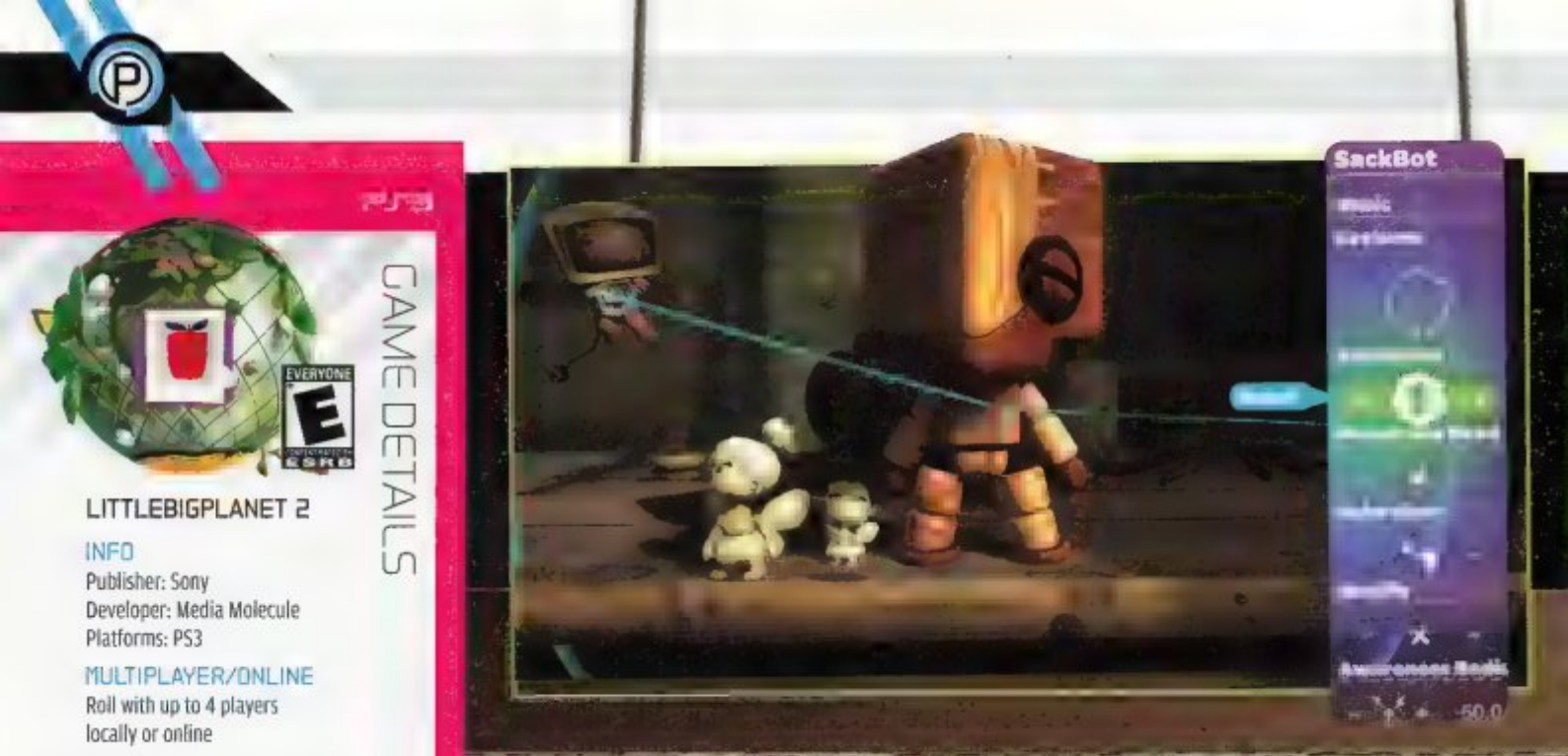
PLANET PLAY

While the main game is navigated using a DualShock/Sixaxis controller, there's a separate section of LittleBigPlanet 2 that's been designed specifically for PlayStation Move. Essentially, one player uses the Move controller to manipulate the environment while the other player controls Sackboy to navigate through the hazards of a prehistoric world. Imagine, for example, a volcanic explosion raining fire down on Sackboy. It's up to the Move player to pick up a stone "umbrella" to shelter Sackboy from certain death while he jumps from point to point.

Sackbots can be customized in the same way that the player character can.

These guys are not as cute as they look.

THE LBP2 EXPERIENCE OFFERS A BEVY OF NEW TOOLS TO USE



GAME DETAILS

LITTLEBIGPLANET 2

INFO
Publisher: Sony
Developer: Media Molecule
Platforms: PS3

MULTIPLAYER/ONLINE
Roll with up to 4 players locally or online

GENRE
Platformer

RELEASE DATE
January 18, 2011

SUITABLE FOR
Aspiring game designers, puppeteers, and (infinite) value-seekers

PLAY THIS!

Why the original *LittleBigPlanet*, of course! There's nothing quite like it, and your creations will import directly into the sequel.

WHAT'S GREAT:
- ❤ Like the original, but better in every way
- ❤ Game types, enemies, and level designs infinitely more customizable
- ❤ Improved community options.

WHAT'S NOT SO GREAT:
- ✖ Might all this game design be easier with a mouse and keyboard? Oh well, never mind.

Media Molecule loves it when plans come together

Already, users have been having their way with *LBP2*'s creative tools, as both the developers at Media Molecule as well as community members have already created pattern-matching games, side-scrolling shooters, top-down shooters, and even an RTS. "Without a doubt [the most impressive thing] has been seeing levels/games that have nothing to do with platforming," says Fong. "People made levels ranging from shooters to calculators, and what was surprising was that we thought Media Molecule had already explored all the ways the tools could be used."

And as far as tips for crafting your own? Fong says that starting with a plan/level/game layout (either in-game or on paper), is key, and should be worked through before spending time polishing and ironing out small details. "I see a lot of people spend a lot of time with a single aspect of their level, only to realize it doesn't work the way they want it to," says Fong. "So they simply start over from scratch, which leads to lost time and frustration."

All downloadable content from the first game will be usable in this sequel...

Calling all cars or calling all cows? Your choice.

Dominate

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Only in a truly dystopian future could a major newspaper's headline feature double exclamation points.

Join Team American Insurgence in THQ's upcoming war opus • Words: Evan Shamoon

War games, particularly those of the first-person shooting variety, are a dime a dozen in today's videogame landscape. But Kaos Studios has something different planned for *Homefront*: a near-future vision of an occupied America. "*Homefront* is definitely an FPS at its core," says Zach Wilson, senior level designer. "Our goal is to use this very mature, popular genre to tell a really compelling story in an emotionally evocative world. We want to provide the player with a more realistic guerilla combat experience—this game isn't about getting combos from creative kills; it's about the sacrifice and struggle that come from having to fight for what you believe in."

Homefront's single-player campaign is played from the perspective of the American resistance; the country is effectively occupied by North Korea, and civilians and human cost are prominently rendered. "It's [an] FPS that features a combination of a deep, story-driven world with humanity and character development, combined with moments of intense action, spectacle, and large battles, [which] is something that you don't generally experience in one FPS," says Dave Votypka, GM and creative director at Kaos Studios. "It's usually one or the other, so we feel that *Homefront* is really going to stand out."

Homefront's multiplayer mode expands to vehicle-based, large-scale warfare between the fractured U.S. military and the occupying Korean forces. Kaos is using its long heritage of large-scale warfare games (dating back to *Desert Combat* and *Battlefield 2*) to take its multiplayer mode in some new directions.

Perhaps as much as anything, the team is working to illuminate the tension between its characters wanting to liberate the country at any cost, versus the desire to protect innocent lives. "The two main characters in your squad very much embody this struggle, and their points of view articulate that conflict," says Wilson. "One of the characters cares very much about the individuals he has taken responsibility for, and that frequently extends to wanting to protect all innocents. Another character cares almost exclusively about destroying the Korean occupation at any cost. They both want the same thing but have different ideas about how to go about it." Sounds familiar, doesn't it?

KNOW YOUR FOE

THE VICE GUIDE TO NORTH KOREA

Capturing the essence of what a North Korean occupation might be like has certainly been a challenge, not least for the country's isolationism. To compensate, the team worked with former CIA member Tae Kim to gain insight into the politics and personalities at work in the country, reining in its assumptions and realigning them with the analyst's actual experiences. The team also cites documentary material, including *The Vice Guide to North Korea*, as invaluable.

RED DAWN REDEMPTION \\

One of Votykpa's primary inspirations for *Homefront* came from seeing *Red Dawn* as a kid. "There were moments in that film where you saw a very familiar America, but it was twisted by Russian troops patrolling the streets, parachuting onto a high school football field, putting Americans in prison camps and so on," says Votykpa. "These scenes evoked feelings of 'something's not right with this picture.'" This lead to one of the team's eventual vision statements: "The familiar has become alien." Familiar America has been twisted by energy crisis and occupation. "This idea is a powerful one that has generated a great deal of creative opportunity for us," says Votykpa.

So the team was thrilled when THQ's executive vice president, Danny Bilson, brought John Milius, the writer and director of *Red Dawn*, onto the project. Milius' main role has been contributing to and writing the story outline, as well as guiding key creative decisions (such as avoiding the hackneyed "save the entire country yourself" storyline) and focusing on a smaller, human story—something players might be more apt to identify with.

KAOS' VISION STATEMENT: "THE FAMILIAR HAS BECOME ALIEN."

REBUILDING AMERICA \\

"Our game is totally geared at capturing the essence of America," says Wilson. "We've gone to great pains to evoke the feeling of living in a ruined, occupied America." This is something primarily captured through the game's graphical treatment. "The game world's 'environmental narrative' is a big part of what sets the game apart visually," says Votypka. "From how a suburban cul-de-sac has been retrofitted for post-energy-crisis living, to how another suburban block has become a Korean Labor camp housing American civilian workers." A great deal of thought and research has gone into realizing the details of how people might exist in this alternate reality.

XBOX 360 PS3 PC

GAME DETAILS

HOMEFRONT

INFO
Publisher: THQ
Developer: Kaos Studios, Digital Extremes (PC)
Platforms: Xbox 360, PS3, PC

MULTIPLAYER/ONLINE
Yes

GENRE
First-person shooter

RELEASE DATE
2011

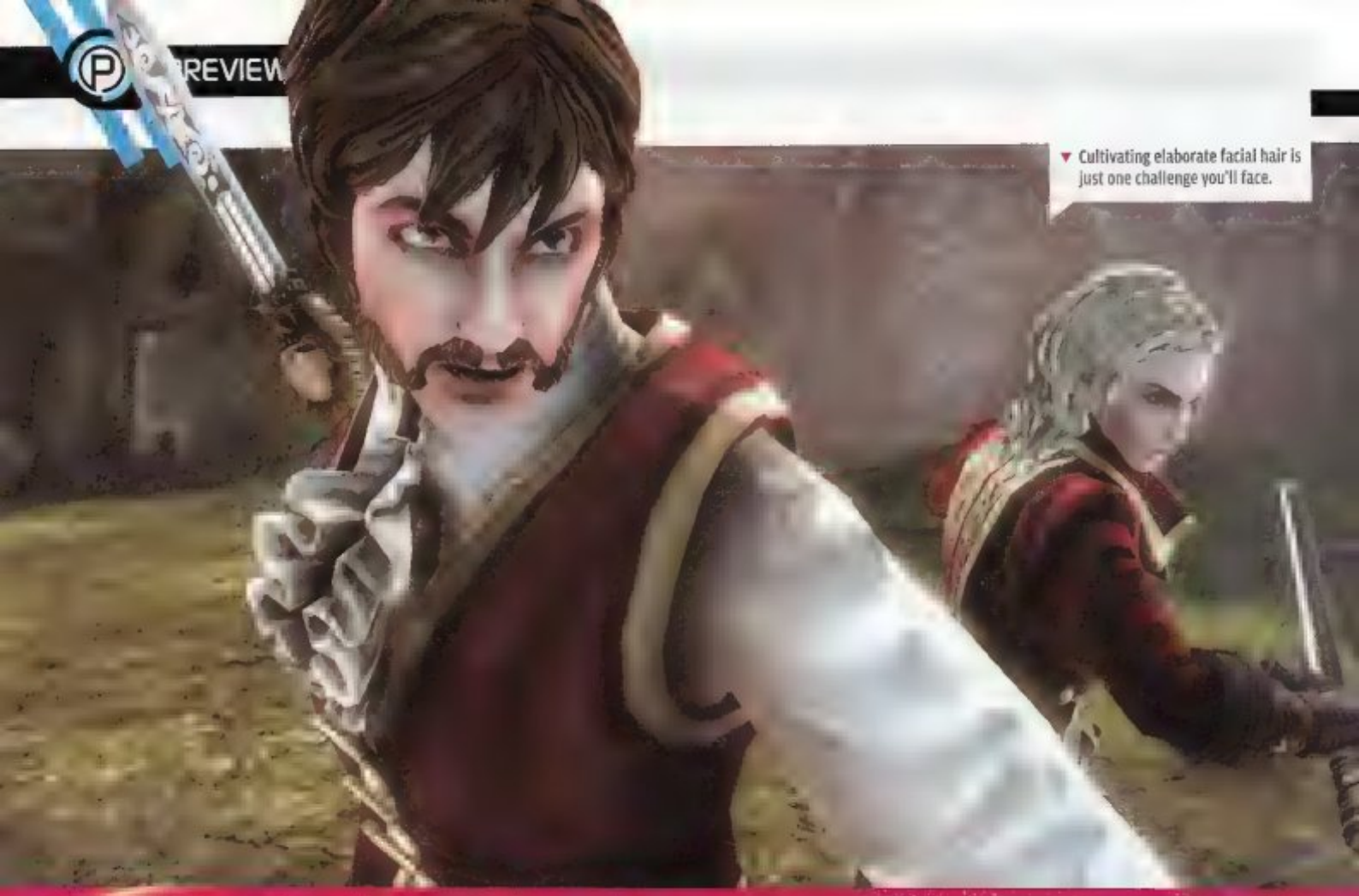
SUITABLE FOR
McCarthyists, conspiracy theorists, FPS junkies

NOT OUT YET? PLAY THIS!

If you can't wait for *Homefront* you'll most definitely enjoy *Freedom Fighters*, io Interactive's Soviet invasion shooter.

WHAT'S GREAT:
- War games generally lack emotion, Homefront could be different
- North Korea has it coming
- Large scale multiplayer vehicle combat

WHAT'S NOT SO GREAT:
- Yes. It's another war game
- There's no virtual Kim Jong-il to beat up on



▼ Cultivating elaborate facial hair is just one challenge you'll face.

FABLE III

It's great to be king (unless you go and screw it up) Words: Alex Porter

This installment of the series sets the action 50 years after *Fable II*, albeit in the same mythical land of Albion. The world has evolved and entered the industrial age, complete with bustling cities and machines seemingly ripped from the pages of Jules Verne's classics. Against this backdrop you'll rise to power, rally the rabble to revolt against the king, and eventually seize the throne.

Peter Molyneux, Fable's idea man, has revised the clichéd fantasy role-playing genre and dispensed with the endless menus and arcane rules that require college textbook-sized manuals to follow. And as ever, your in-game moral choices shape your character's interactions, weapons, appearance, and the story itself; be a bloodthirsty and self-serving toolbag and you'll grow horns and exude a cloud of foul odor; take an honorable and just path and you'll find yourself flush with allies and trusty followers. Might help the B.O., too.

Fable III's story centers on you as a princess or prince who goes into exile after your brother's power-mad rule threatens to ruin the kingdom. You travel the land campaigning for the trust of Albion's oppressed citizens. After each mission on the literal and figurative Road to Rule, you pass milestones and access chests full of skills, upgrades, spells, etc.

Instead of the usual RPG experience-point system, *Fable III* uses Guild Seals, which you can use to unlock the beautiful/booty-full chests that you earn along the way by winning approval and fights. And influencing others is where the game does some serious innovating: In order to ingratiate yourself, you have to shake hands, belch, tease, hug, flirt, dance, and engage in tons of other little interactions. Use them skillfully and you'll have a massive army willing to take up arms against your crackpot king.

To paraphrase Tony Montana, "Money Power. Women." The world of *Fable III* follows similar rules. Riches help. Murder and pillage (though drug trafficking is out) are one way to gain power, but you can also just marry someone with tons of loot. Can't stand your spouse? Divorce leaves you with half the estate. Cha-ching!

MURDER AND PILLAGE ARE ONE WAY TO GAIN POWER

▲ Albion is as picturesque as ever, at least until you run it into the ground through excessive taxation.

▲ As silly-looking as that gun is we would probably still do whatever they said. But that hat's really too much.

MENUS BE GONE

Fable III will make a novel effort to jettison all of the on-screen clutter of a typical RPG. *Fable III*'s alternative is a unique visual system for accessing it all. Hit the "pause" button and you'll enter the Sanctuary, a series of chambers that include a dressing room, a treasury, a war room (that is, your world map), and an armory. There, your cheeky butler (voiced by John Cleese, no less), makes suggestions on what to wear, what weapons to use, and cracks on your questionable moral choices.

MASS KICKAGE

Like most RPGs, *Fable III* offers you a choice of swords, guns, magic blasts, or simply fists. But the combat is of a decidedly action-based nature, akin to the fluid, real-time combat of *Soulcalibur*. Your character can employ a vast series of combo attacks and continually graduate to bigger, better weapons. These weapons can even evolve on the fly, in a direction determined by your personal fighting style. But the best weapon of all may be your canine companion, ready to tear the throat out of enemies at your command.

XBOX 360 PC

GAME DETAILS

FABLE III

INFO
Publisher: Microsoft
Developer: Lionhead Studios
Platforms: Xbox 360, PC

MULTIPLAYER/ONLINE
Both

GENRE
Action-RPG

RELEASE DATE
October 26, 2010

SUITABLE FOR
Fans of role-playing, sword-and-sorcery epics, minimal interfaces

NOT OUT YET? PLAY THIS!

Fable II: The previous 360 game can be had for a bargain price, and is still an excellent way to raise a puppy and discover the land of Albion.

WHAT'S GREAT:
- ❤ Same great British wit and sense of humor
- ❤ Fresh new UI rocks the boat a bit
- ❤ All-star (British) voice cast

WHAT'S NOT SO GREAT:
- ✖ We're still not sure if they've gotten the combat just right
- ✖ John Cleese dissed our armor
- ✖ Probably won't win over non-fans

JAMES BOND 007: BLOODSTONE

It wouldn't be Bond without fancy cars

• Words: Lizzie Cuevas

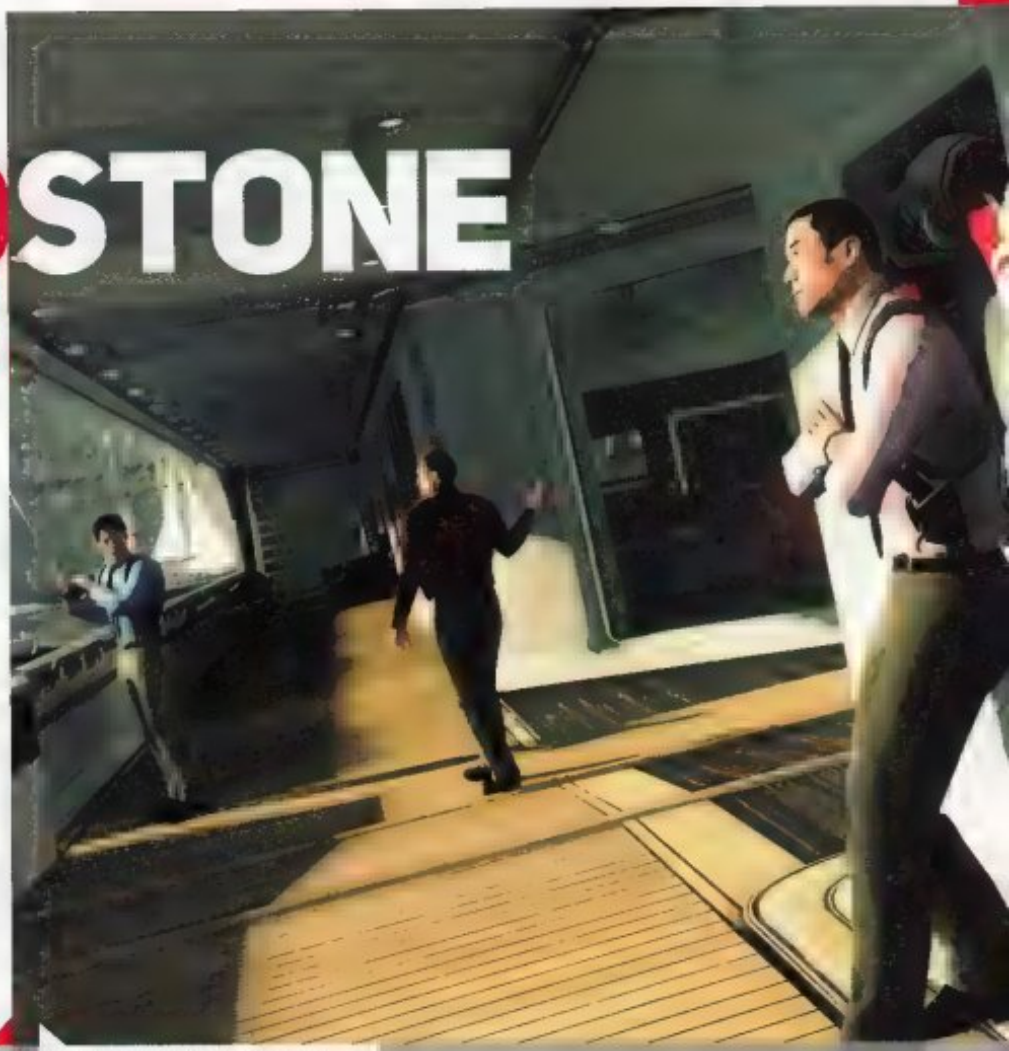
You know Bond, James Bond. And while you may recognize Daniel Craig's CGI doppelganger in Activision's upcoming James Bond 007: Blood Stone, the game itself isn't based on a Bond movie. Blood Stone features an original storyline written by Bruce Feirstein, writer of past Bond games and movies.

On paper, Blood Stone has all the elements of a solid Bond experience. A third-person shooter, the game has plenty of weapons to choose from. However, 007 is much more than a sharpshooter, with an arsenal of 67 or so close-up kills, each dependent on the environment and circumstance.

A spy's also gotta have his or her gadgets. Sure, the smart phone may sound like a simple device in this day and age of technology, but does your smart phone locate enemies, show your weapons, and guide you to your next objective? Bond's does, and it was particularly helpful in a mission where I had to take down a helicopter. One of the great things about Blood Stone is that there are different ways to complete a task or objective. In this case I could've shot down the helicopter...if I wanted to be boring. Instead I pulled out my spy phone and followed its directions to a nearby crane, which I then rotated around with some force, smacking down the pesky nuisance.

Of course, it wouldn't be a Bizarre Creations game without racing. Nearly every mission has some sort of racing challenge incorporated, and it's not limited to cars—there are also boat chases. One mission we played involved chasing a train in Siberia. Because of the snowy environment, I really had to control my driving so I wouldn't slip and skid into the freezing water. It got even more hectic after the last checkpoint, when the ice started breaking behind me.

The racing elements are definitely cool, but the controls seem a bit lacking, especially for a game developed by Bizarre. It felt like I should be able to do more than just accelerate and brake. Then again, this isn't solely a racing game, and its combat-racing hybrid nature makes up for the simplistic vehicle controls. Plus, I probably wouldn't score any kudos for drifting over the snow into a river, anyway.



▲ A bad guy, a waiter and a bored police-looking guy: It's like a next-gen update of *Hogan's Alley*.

GAMEPLAY \\

In addition to his fancy phone, James Bond can use Focus Aim to take down enemies. Much like Bullet Time, Focus Aim slows down time so you can target an enemy and execute him in one shot. You can only stock three uses of Focus Aim at a time, but as in real life you can always regenerate it through combat.

ALL-STAR CAST

A CGI Daniel Craig wouldn't be the same without Daniel Craig's voice. *Blood Stone* features voice acting from the man himself, as well as singer-songwriter and actress Joss Stone, the game's "Bond girl." But if you have to see Bond to believe Bond, the game uses real moves motion captured by Daniel Craig's stunt double from *Casino Royale* and *Quantum of Solace*.

▼ When Bond goes driving things start exploding. You get used to it after a while... probably.

BIZARRE RACING

Bizarre Creations is adding a twist with all sorts of mission-based racing. That should come as no surprise, as some of the studios' more notable previous works include the *Project Gotham Racing* series and *Blur*. Bizarre also made stuffed-animal shooter *Fur Fighters*, which certainly lived up to the studio's moniker.

PS3 XBOX 360 PC

GAME DETAILS

HANDS-ON

JAMES BOND 007: BLOOD STONE

INFO
Publisher: Activision
Developer: Bizarre Creations
Platforms: PS3, Xbox 360, PC

MULTIPLAYER/ONLINE
Up to 16-player online multi-player

GENRE
Third-person shooter / Racing

RELEASE DATE
November 2, 2010

SUITABLE FOR
Fans of 007 games willing to give the series another chance

NOT OUT YET? PLAY THIS!

GoldenEye 007: Widely acknowledged as the best Bond game, Rare's classic N64 shooter is still a fun time, ancient visuals aside. A Wii-make is coming soon, too.

WHAT'S GREAT:
- ❤ Shooting, stealth kills, and racing, all in one game
- ❤ More than one way to complete missions

WHAT'S NOT SO GREAT:
- ✖ The driving feels surprisingly simplistic by Bizarre standards
- ✖ I was really hoping for no less than 68 close-up killing methods

ASSASSIN'S CREED Brotherhood

I flew to Montreal to spend the day with Ubisoft's latest, Assassin's Creed: Brotherhood. The company's labyrinthine office, located in what used to be a textile plant and replete with brick, concrete, and stone, felt like a fitting venue in which to check out this promising new title.

Assassin's Creed: Brotherhood is a bit of an oddball. Is it a sequel to Assassin's Creed II? Should it be called Assassin's Creed III? Rather than letting themselves get caught up in nomenclature and semantics, the development team decided to simply name the game after one of its core components: brotherhood.

Assassin's Creed: Brotherhood picks up right where Assassin's Creed II left off, with Ezio and Desmond fighting the Templars to figure out exactly what's going on, all the while trying to save ancient Rome from those who would do her harm. If you're familiar with the series you know that Ezio fights in medieval Rome, while Desmond does his thing in the modern day. While the majority of the action takes place in the past, the development team listened to gamers who'd cried out for more Desmond action, a request they were more than happy to fulfill. During the Ezio segments Brotherhood is fairly open-ended, à la Red Dead Redemption and GTA, and you can expect to spend dozens of hours of gameplay scooting around Renaissance Rome. Unlike the Ezio segments, the Desmond levels are much more linear, and you won't spend quite as much time playing as him.

When you're making a sequel it can be difficult to engage folks who weren't around for the earlier games. This doesn't seem to be a problem for Assassin's Creed: Brotherhood, as new players won't necessarily have to know what happened in the previous games to figure out what's happening in Brotherhood. That's no small feat when you consider just how convoluted and intricate the series' time-jumping shenanigans can be.

ROMAN GLORY

Jumping into Assassin's Creed: Brotherhood, the first thing you'll notice is how huge Rome is. According to the folks at Ubisoft, the Rome of Brotherhood is one of the biggest worlds they've ever built. Of course, when a world is this large, getting around is bound to be an issue.

As assassins, Ezio and Desmond are free to get about any way they can, and more often than not this means scaling walls and jumping from roof to roof. Anyone who is a fan of parkour, or Assassin's Creed II for that matter, will love the fluidity of the characters' movements. Free-running is even more fluid than before, with a great number of paths to discover and exploit.

The story is simple enough. The Borgia clan is ruling Rome with an iron fist, and the city reflects this visually. Rome's inhabitants are

RENAISSANCE ROME: EZIO THE LEADER

Under the despotic Borgia clan, the city of Rome is a decidedly dreary and depressing place. With the economy a wreck, the city's streets are awash with beggars, criminals, and an assortment of other "unwanted" types. As the game progresses and Ezio frees sections of the city from Borgia control, the town becomes more colorful and the people happier. Beggars and criminals are replaced with merchants, the denizens dress more colorfully, and Rome becomes a much nicer place.

downtrodden and the streets are rife with criminals, beggars, and thieves. In Brotherhood, Ezio is no longer developing his skills and reputation, as he's already (rightfully) a legend. This impacts the game a bit, as the guards will know who you are.

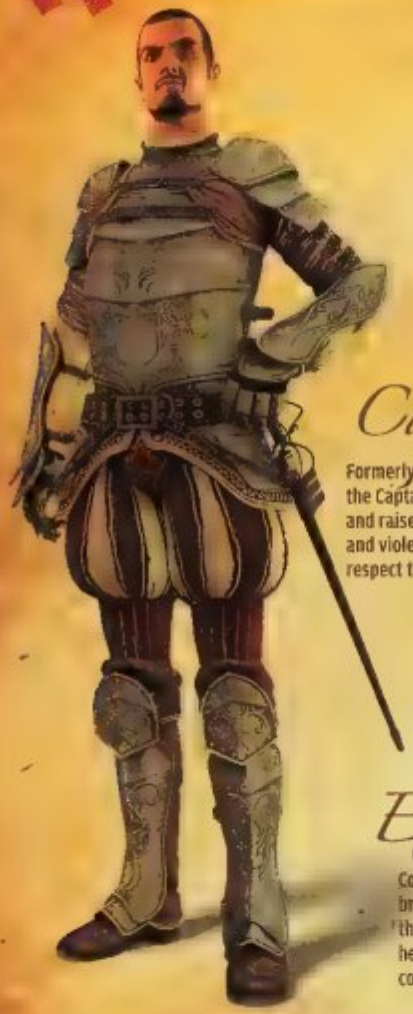
As Ezio goes about freeing Rome from the Borgia clan one neighborhood at a time, you'll notice that Rome becomes a much nicer place, replete with merchants and women strolling with parasols.

FATAL FRIENDS

Essentially a follow-up to *Assassin's Creed II*, many of the same characters play a part in Brotherhood. You'll run into Cesare Borgia, Machiavelli... even the Pope makes an appearance.

Your fellow assassins are among the most helpful characters, as you can use them to do your dirty work and fill your coffers by sending them on side contract missions. They'll earn experience, you'll earn bank. Good deal.

NOT SO CLOSE, BUDDY!
Depending on the sitch, Ezio may not want to get close. This dude's about to lose his saving throws: crossbow-in-face.



Captain

Formerly known as the Soldier, the Captain is trained in battle and raised in a world of war and violence. But he does respect the codes of honor.

Executioner

Cold-hearted, merciless and brutal, you'll often encounter the Executioner doing what he does best, killing Rome's condemned.

Prowler

Like Ezio himself, the Prowler uses stealth and agility to catch his victims. While his enemies run wildly through the streets of Rome, the Prowler is able to attack from above. His weapon of choice is the hidden blade.

Blacksmith

More than a mere tool, his Hammer defines the Blacksmith. When Ezio isn't visiting the Blacksmith to get his weapons repaired, the Blacksmith hammers his foes in combat.

MULTIPLAYER: AT LAST

NEED AN ASSASSIN?

Rome, with its massive layout and hordes of inhabitants, is a great place for team-based multiplayer. In a first for the Assassin's Creed series, Ubisoft created four unique multiplayer modes for Brotherhood (of which we were shown two). Wanted is a mode where up to eight players are assigned a different player to kill. The rub? While you're hunting another assassin, someone else has a contract for you, and you won't know who that person is until they attack you or otherwise blow their cover. Once you kill your intended victim you'll be assigned a new one, and the last assassin standing wins. The other multiplayer mode is called Alliance, where three to four pairs of assassins compete to be the last team alive. One team member can prowl the rooftops, while the other searches the streets for their victims.

▼ If you're ever between a spear and a hard place you can always bury a massive ax in your antagonist's face. Gotta say, though, they hate it when you do that.

Doctor

This Doctor doesn't live by the Hippocratic Oath. In fact, he's probably killed more patients than he's saved. His favorite weapon is a poison-filled syringe. No one has ever seen his face, or his diploma.

YELLOW ASSASSINS

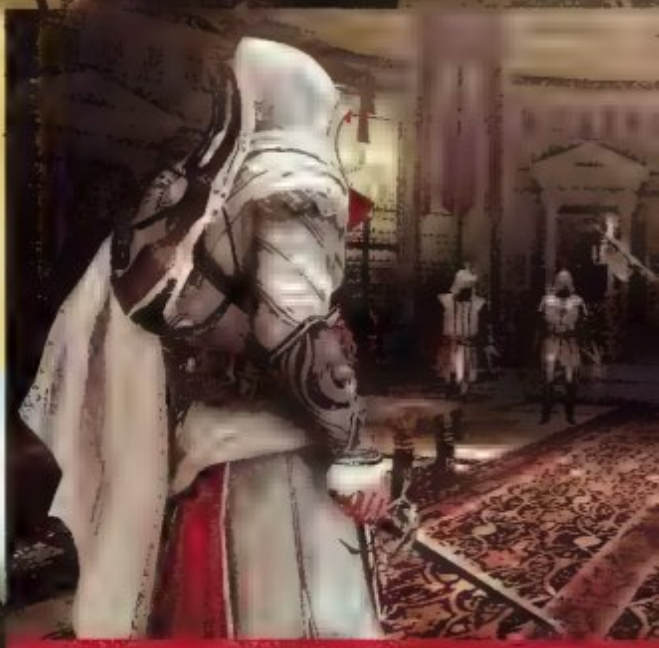
As Ezio gains influence, he'll amass a group of assassins that he can use as he sees fit. If, for instance, you find yourself in a particularly dicey situation, you can call on your assassins to do your dirty work. The more your assassins do battle with and for you, the greater their skills become. A fairly wide open game, you can also send your assassins on secondary contract missions to earn you money and them valuable experience points.

Courtesan

Courtesans walk the streets of Rome hustling anyone and everyone. While they have a soft spot for assassins, they're still plenty deadly. That fan, while pretty, is one gnarly weapon.

MULTIPLAYER: STEALTH IS KEY

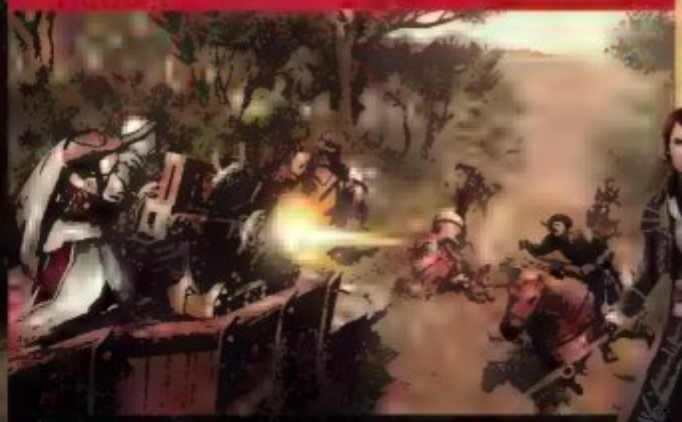
Once an assassin finds their target, and the target realizes that they are in fact a target, the chase is on. Of course, chasing your target out in the open will make it easier for the assassin who's got it in for you to track you down. With that in mind, you'll have to be careful when going in for the kill. Is it safe for you, too?



BROTHERHOOD REINFORCEMENT

When dealing with *Brotherhood*'s more formidable bosses, you'll want to call in your various assassin buddies to help dispatch the bad guys. Sure hope you trained them up first, though, or their skills might not be up to the task at hand.

WAR MACHINES
Leonardo da Vinci's War Machines are an awesome addition to Brotherhood. This ship-based cannon can't help but be fun. I mean, look at it.



MILITARY TECH
Kind of a hand cannon on steroids, this early version of a gatling gun is another one of Da Vinci's crazy ideas. Also, kindly keep all talk of anachronisms to yourself.

TEMPLARS
The Templars are a nasty lot that don't mind killing the occasional priest or two.

RECRUIT AND TRAIN

COULDYA RUN TO THE STORE?

When it's time to send your assassins out on missions you'll have a ton of options to consider. For instance, you can choose the length of the mission, starting at 10 minutes, depending on how soon you think you'll need that assassin back. You can also choose the relative difficulty of the mission, and the game will tell you the likelihood that your assassin will complete it. Of course, the higher the degree of difficulty the more money your assassin will earn for you, and the more experience they'll earn for themselves. It's a balancing act to send your brethren out on the hardest missions they can possibly complete without failing.

PS3 XBOX 360 PC

GAME DETAILS

ASSASSIN'S CREED: BROTHERHOOD

INFO
Publisher: Ubisoft
Developer: Ubisoft
Platforms: Xbox 360, PS3, PC

MULTIPLAYER/ONLINE
Wanted: eight assassins compete against each other; Alliance: teams of two compete against each other

GENRE
Action-adventure

RELEASE DATE
November 16, 2010

SUITABLE FOR
Fans of *Assassin's Creed*, stabbing things

BEST BUY
Preorder Exclusive
Extra[illegible] to unlock the [illegible] assassin known as Desmond's ally.

NOT OUT YET? PLAY THIS!

If you finished AC2 and you're dying to play a similar game, you might want to scope *Prince of Persia: The Forgotten Sands*. These two titles have a similar look and feel.

WHAT'S GREAT:
- *Assassin's Creed* finally has multiplayer
- Rome is amazingly rendered and huge
- The side missions offer tons of gameplay

WHAT'S NOT SO GREAT:
- There still might not be enough Desmond action to satisfy fans

NBA Jam
Get ready to get ridiculous

NBA 2K11
The return of the king

NBA Elite 11
NBA Live gets a makeover

NBA GAME SHOOTAROUND

Find out if this year's hoops games swish or clank off the rim • Words: Aaron Boulding

The emphasis on nostalgic dunks seems to be a theme for this year's crop of NBA games. Dunking is a way of life in the reborn NBA Jam franchise, and the amount of Michael Jordan-flavored gameplay in NBA Elite 11 and NBA 2K11 only reminds us that roundball was different in the air up there. If you've been ignoring basketball videogames—like Jordan did for much of his career—with all of their top-to-bottom quality and retro cool, this year's crop makes it a fine time to get back on the court.

OVER-THE-TOP \\ *NBA Jam*'s 2-on-2 style of gameplay is super-fun, super-quick, and super-ridiculous.

NBA JAM

Publisher: EA Sports • Developer: Electronic Arts • Platforms: PS3, Xbox 360, Wii

Take today's NBA superstars, add plenty of legendary players, and focus only on the crowd-pleasing aspects of basketball...you've got NBA Jam. NBA Jam is true to its classic roots. The simplified controls put the emphasis on individual player reactions and skill, instead of mastery over complex combos.

The longer career modes in Jam are interesting as a means of unlocking items, players, and bonuses but make no mistake: NBA Jam is a multiplayer game. Do what you've got to do to unlock legends, such as Scottie Pippen, Patrick Ewing, and Mark Price. Once you've got old and new players available, however, battling with up to three other buddies is what makes this game shine, just like it did in the '90s. Bridging the gap is the original Jam announcer delivering old favorites ("Is it the shoes?!") and modern updates ("confiscate that tape!").

In *NBA Jam* you can even play as the most hated man in the NBA. (Psst, it's LeBron.)

WHAT'S GREAT:
- Over-the-top fun
- Super-easy to get into

WHAT'S NOT SO GREAT:
- May be too arcade-y for hardcore basketball fans

OVERALL RATING: 3.5/5

NBA 2K11

EVERYONE E ESRB

Publisher: Take-Two Interactive •
Developer: Visual Concepts • **Platforms:** PS3, Xbox 360, Wii, PC, PS2, PSP

It's probably better to think of NBA 2K11 as an interactive homage to the Chicago Bulls of the Michael Jordan-era. Not only will you be able to re-create iconic moments and games from Jordan's dominant years, you'll have no choice if you want to beat the Michael Jordan Challenge. Putting up 63 in a playoff game or outscoring Dominique Wilkins is like playing a hoops history lesson.

The level of visual detail throughout NBA 2K11 is outstanding, especially the Jordan elements. You'll see his tongue start wagging only once he gathers on a drive. And yes, Dennis Rodman's hair color does change on different Bulls teams... but not at all when he's on the Pistons. The Bulls mascot was even doing MC Hammer's "typewriter" dance during a game.

When you're using great players in NBA 2K11, the Isomotion system feels more fluid and intuitive than ever. When you're using Jordan, it feels like the best hoop game of all time.

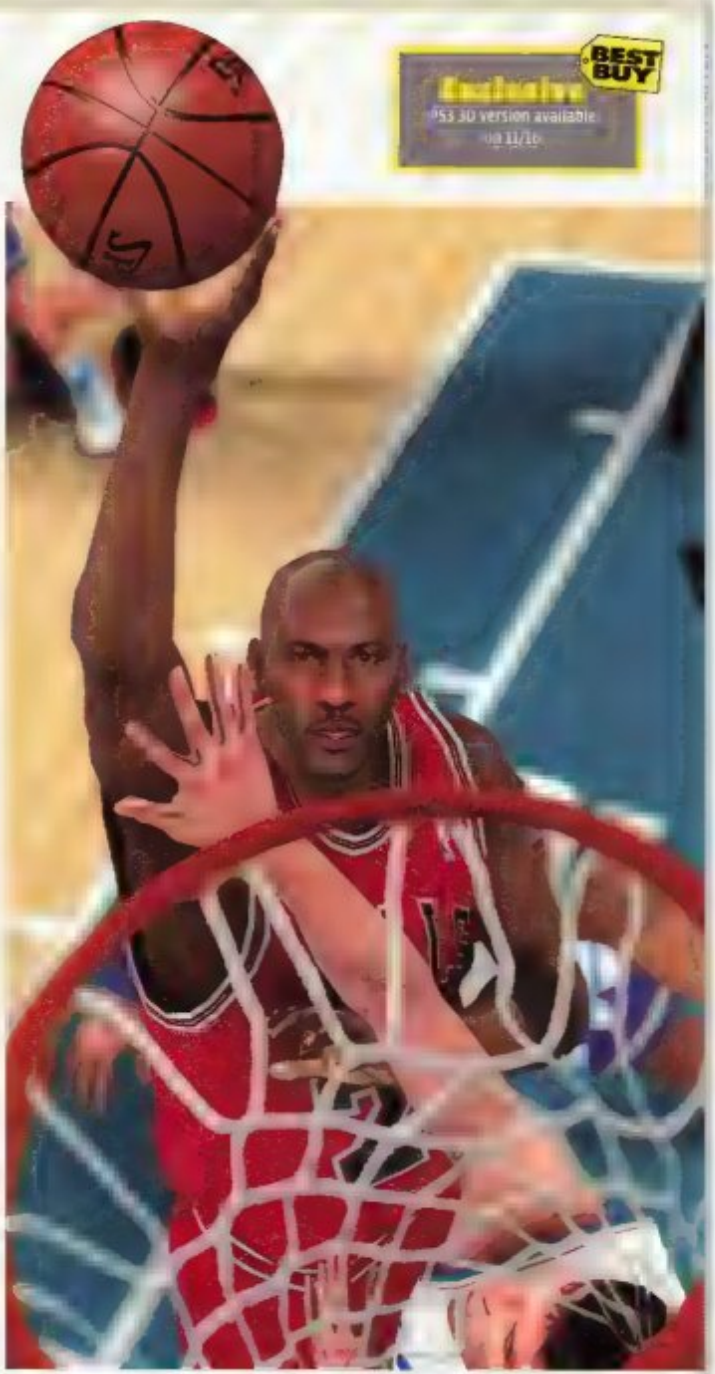
THE LEVEL OF VISUAL DETAIL THROUGH-OUT IS OUTSTANDING

WHAT'S GREAT:
- Jordan makes a great franchise better
- Amazing visuals

WHAT'S NOT SO GREAT:
- Focus on Jordan may turn off Jordan haters

OVERALL RATING: 4.75/5

Jameer Nelson is about to break somebody's ankles.



HIS AIRNESS \\ Being able to play in Michael Jordan's 10 most iconic games is really awesome.

No NBA game is complete without Kobe posterizing an opponent.

NBA ELITE 11

EVERYONE E ESRB

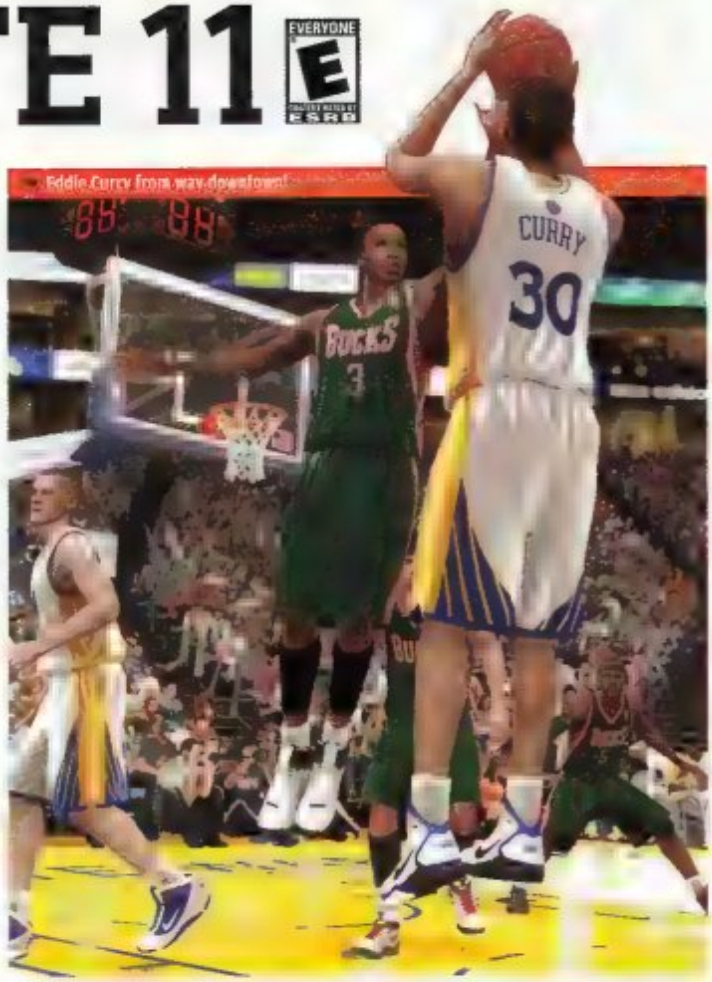
Publisher: EA Sports •
Developer: Electronic Arts • Platforms: PS3, Xbox 360

Formerly known as NBA Live, EA Sports' hoop franchise will come with a new control scheme and a new character-building career mode called Become Legendary, both of which should be worth playing. All of your crossovers, jab steps, and other dribble moves are still on the right control stick, but now you'll have analog shooting control on there, too. With fewer buttons to memorize, you'll have to make sure your skills on the stick are pinpoint-precise.

Winning awards, taking down scoring titles, and matching various single-game accomplishments of the great Michael Jeffrey Jordan will earn you tons of points in Become Legendary. Dropping 55 in New York will be tough for your low-rated rookie. That's why fundamentals, such as setting screens and executing set plays, will be rewarded as well. Control will be permanently locked to your guy during a game, so be patient with your CPU teammates—you'll be unlocking Air Jordan shoes and maxing out your ratings in no time early next year.

FUNDAMENTALS, SUCH AS SETTING SCREENS, WILL BE REWARDED AS WELL

Makeover
The game formerly known as *NBA Live* gets a much-needed makeover



Eddie Curry from way downtown!

Battle of the big men: Gasol gets ready for Kevin Garnett

CONTROL \\ In *NBA Elite 11* you control one player, so choose your player wisely and hope your AI buddies know what they're doing.

PREVIEW

RELEASE DATE
Q1 2011

HANDS-ON

WHAT'S GREAT:
- New control scheme works
- Tons of gameplay modes
- Great soundtrack

WHAT'S NOT SO GREAT:
- Controls are tougher
- Gameplay lacks smoothness
- The announcers suck

AVAILABLE IN-STORE

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TOP PICKS

RATINGS BREAKDOWN:

@GAMER includes only the best games in our Top Picks section. If you don't see it here, it's probably not worth getting.

- An average game. Just worthy enough to call to your attention.
- A good game that we recommend.
- An excellent game that we strongly recommend.
- A near-perfect gaming experience.

64 MEDAL OF HONOR

Hey, meet the crew!

@GAMER wants you to know about the best-of-the-best games out now or coming soon, so we've put together a different kind of Geek Squad to help you out.

Lizzie Cuevas

When Lizzie isn't planning her wedding to Master Chief, she produces video content for GamesRadar.com. Favorite Thanksgiving food: Stuffing with Fritos chips.

Mitch Dyer

Mitch is Canadian, so he knows Thanksgiving is in October. But he toasts his U.S. pals in November... with another holiday meal. Favorite Thanksgiving food: Mashed potatoes and gravy.

Andy Salisbury

Andy spends all of his time with RPGs and FPSes. He's told he can play the drums well, but he doesn't believe it. Favorite Thanksgiving food: Gravy, with a side of mashed potatoes.

Meghan Walt

Meghan enjoys all things outdoor-related as well as hiking, snowboarding and writing stories she never plans to publish. Favorite thanksgiving food: Grandma's cheesy potatoes

TOP PICKS

64 MEDAL OF HONOR
EA brings its shooter classic back and onto current-day battlefields.

68 THE SIMS 3
The popular life simulator takes a fresh turn on consoles.

70 DEAD RISING 2
Piece together weapons, disassemble zombies, viva Las Vegas.

72 FINAL FANTASY XIV
Square Enix adds to their growing line of Final Fantasy titles with this online adventure.

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EA's fab "footy" franchise gets an update.

76 ENSLAVED: ODYSSEY TO THE WEST
Unexpected partners meet, smash foes.

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A new adventure in the world of mixed-martial arts games.

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Cold War foes heat up their relations in SEGA's brand new shooter.

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Harmonix and MTV want to help you go "pro."

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89 Knights in the Nightmare
89 Final Fantasy: The 4 Heroes of Light

MEDAL OF HONOR

Aw, shoot... • Words: Andy Eddy

The long-awaited return of the *Medal of Honor* franchise is here. The venue has changed from World War II to Middle Eastern locations from present-day conflicts, and while the uniforms have been left in the footlockers at the base, the action is much the same. Unfortunately, it doesn't measure up to the earlier entries for numerous reasons.

If you've played a shooter, you pretty much know what you're up against here. You'll be facing a large quantity of enemy combatants, pouring into the battlefield from open doorways and buildings, lining up on balconies to pick you off, and hiding in any nook or cranny you might they can find. Thankfully, you can also use the many cover locations—and have to or you won't survive for long.

You also receive help from an AI-driven squad, which will support your efforts, but act also as an armory of sorts, as you can request more ammo from any of them when you get low. Many times you'll thank your lucky stars that you had these partners, but it's likely that you'll more often grumble about them. I found that they regularly ran in front of a shot I was lining up, leaned into my line of fire, and took up the cover spots with the best angle on the bad guys. They also always seem to know where to go and hustle there as soon as the last enemy is dropped...whether you know it was the last or not. You'll spend a lot of time looking for where they are, like a kid not holding his mother's hand in a mall.

Beyond that, the game's design is intended to keep you immersed in the gameplay—and it does that well. You hardly have a HUD through most of it, but a press on the D-pad will bring up how much ammo you have, what guns you're using, and the current locations of your squad mates, among other things. Add to that, the gameplay is nicely alternated with cutscenes that can be quite dramatic.

I had hoped for much more from this new *MoH* installment—though I applaud that EA, Danger Close, and DICE made some daring choices in covering largely unpopular conflicts. The way it ends, however, leaves the door open to much more. We can only hope that the next chapter will do a better job of challenging its competitors.

SHED NO TIERS

The Campaign Mode also has a "Tier 1" component, which enables you to go through a level on its own and try to set the best time possible. The leaderboards show you how you measure up to your friends and the *MoH* playing public around the world. A timer is always running, but you can use accomplishments such as head shots, melee kills, and chaining together quick enemy kills to momentarily freeze the timer. It's a juggling act of risk vs. reward.

THE GAME'S DESIGN IS INTENDED TO KEEP YOU IMMERSED IN THE GAMEPLAY

▲ Pace your movement toward an objective, and few enemy fighters will get behind you.

GAMEPLAY

▼ Consider every piece of cover has an adversary hiding behind it.

▲ The long-range sniper missions are some of the most entertaining...and the most graphic.

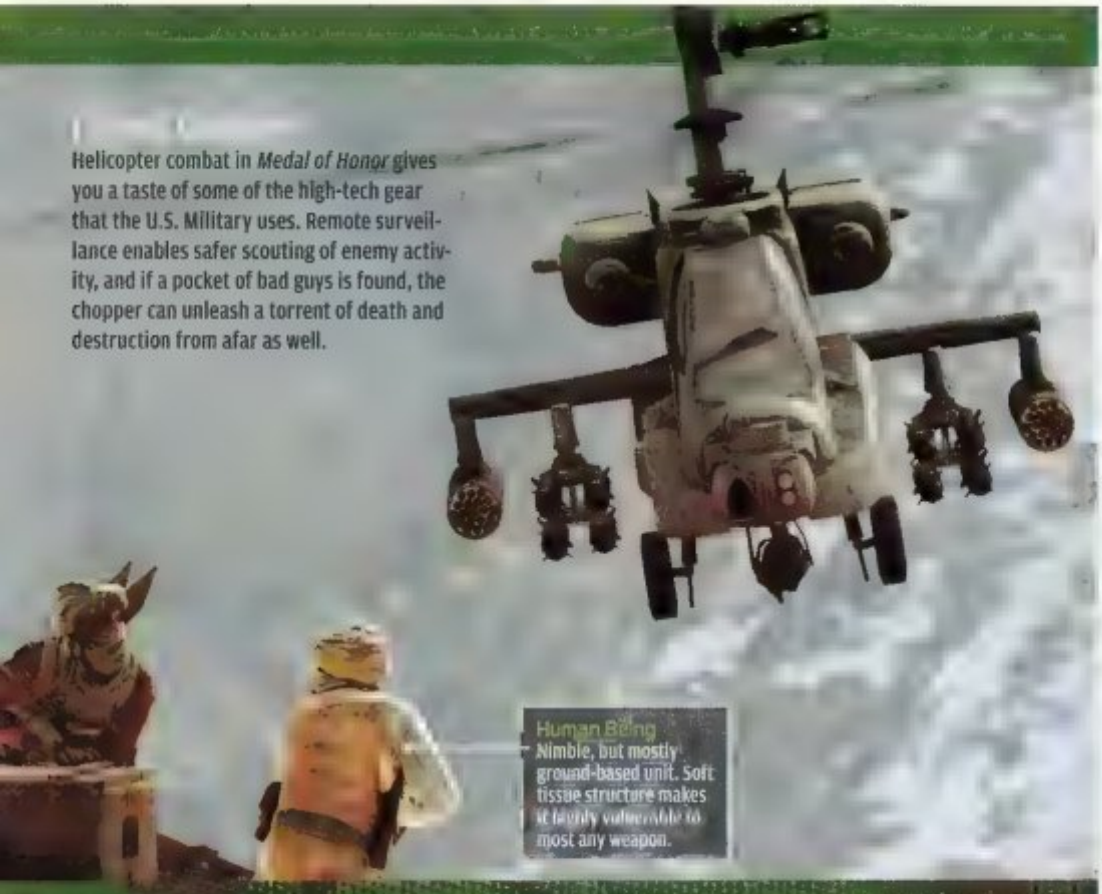
▲ Flame doesn't seem to be a direct threat, but it can mask enemy fighters training their guns on you.

▲ Soldiers need to be prepared to see buddies killed...and have to look out for booby trapped corpses.

MULTIPLAYER

ROLLING WITH DICE

For the multiplayer portion, EA turned to its DICE studio, which has created some of the most engaging multiplayer in video-game history with the many entries in its *Battlefield* franchise. *Medal of Honor*'s multiplayer is deep, with multiple gameplay modes and support for up to 24 players. It also tracks all of your progress across each of the classes, awarding you points for showing your skills. Hitting milestones will earn you rewards, such as new weapons and weapon customizations, so there's an incentive to jump into matches.



Helicopter combat in *Medal of Honor* gives you a taste of some of the high-tech gear that the U.S. Military uses. Remote surveillance enables safer scouting of enemy activity, and if a pocket of bad guys is found, the chopper can unleash a torrent of death and destruction from afar as well.

CONTRO-VERSUS

Medal of Honor's multiplayer raised some pre-release ire when it was stated that one "team" plays as the Taliban, which is tasked with killing the other team, American soldiers. Initially, EA tried to minimize the visual impact in that both teams appeared more or less like civilian fighters, not uniformed officers. This failed to passify those who thought the game's multiplayer was despicable and disrespectful to our soldiers, and EA recently announced that it has renamed the opposing team in multiplayer from "Taliban" to "Opposing Force." What do you think? Send us your feedback to letters@atgamermagazine.com

PS3 XBOX360 PC

GAME DETAILS AND RATINGS

MEDAL OF HONOR

INFO

Publisher: Electronic Arts
Developer: Danger Close, DICE
Platforms: PS3, Xbox 360, PC

MULTIPLAYER/ONLINE

Competitive and team gameplay modes for up to 24 players online

GENRE

Shooter

RELEASE DATE

October 12, 2010

SUITABLE FOR

Shooter enthusiasts who have to have every new entry, *MoH* fans looking to see what's changed

WHAT'S GREAT:

- The campaign is loaded with juicy moments of tension and suspense
- *MoH*'s storyline is strong, and actually evokes pathos
- Multiplayer will give you plenty to do after you finish the campaign

WHAT'S NOT SO GREAT:

- It frequently feels like you're just following your AI squadmates around
- The AI is pretty weak and often gets in your way

- Controversial
- Cover lover
- Where to?

OVERALL RATING: 3.75/5

PAY TO PLAY

SOME WILL PASS

Though EA's Online Pass was introduced on its sports games, *MoH* will also require it for one multiplayer mode. In order to play Clean Sweep, players will need to register their Online Pass, one of which will come with the game. However, other gamertags on the same console or anyone buying the game used will need a separate Online Pass.

WIL SAYS:

As a fan of the *Medal of Honor* series I had high hopes for this latest version. While the various multiplayer modes are super-fun, the weird AI hampered the single-player campaign.

Who doesn't love a good pool party? Like in years past, entertaining is a big part of *The Sims 3* experience.

THE SIMS 3

As a Sim might say, "Sal de muchen, frazzenrah!" • Words: Meghan Walt

Since I've already played *The Sims 3* for the PC quite a bit on my own time, I had to promise myself, as a reviewer of integrity, that I would do more than simply glance at the console version's new features, grow frustrated with the controls, and call it a day after bumming around for a couple hours. Turns out I didn't need to make that promise. Before I had even finished creating my first Sim, I was already readdicted.

As per usual, *The Sims 3* challenges you to control virtual people as they go about their daily lives. But unlike *The Sims 2*, the third expands your controllable territory from one claustrophobic house to a bustling town filled with parks, diners, workplaces, bookstores, and computer-controlled Sims that grow at the same time as your own.

In the PC version your Sims can dart around town from one end to the other without invisible boundaries or nasty loading screens. The console version, however, chops the town into little sectors. For instance, the sector where I plopped my family had three houses and a park. When the missus headed to work, I could opt to follow her, triggering a long loading screen before I was dropped into a larger five-block sector across town.

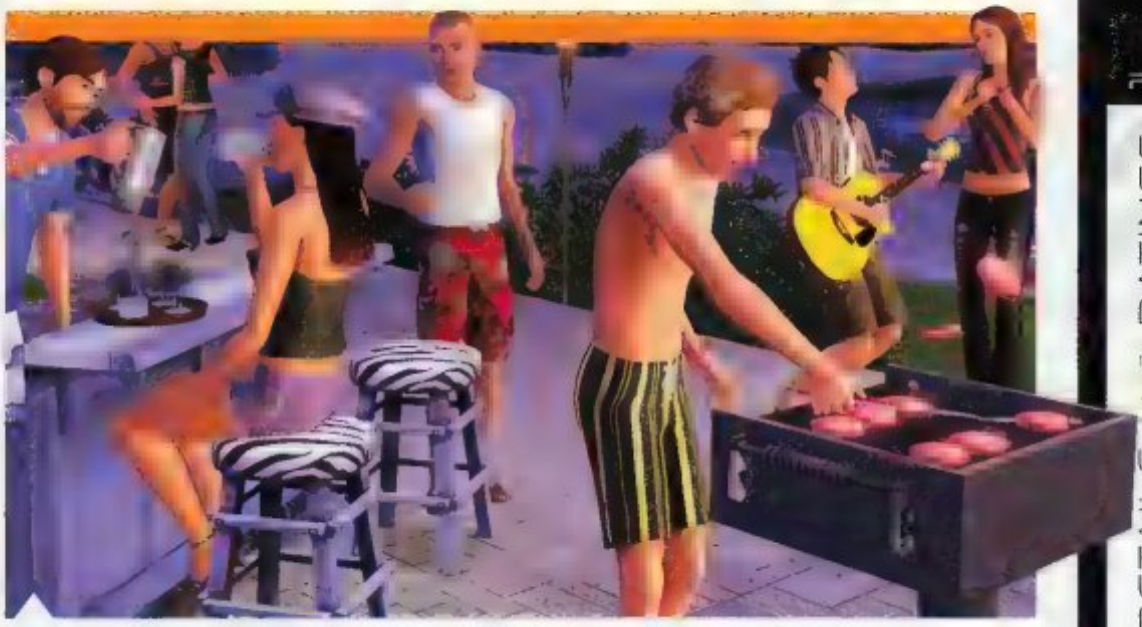
When controlling one Sim, the loading screens aren't so bad. But when you try to manage three or four those screens become a world of pain. Not only is the wait time tiresome, but the Sims tend to become more autonomous once you switch to another sector, ignoring whatever orders you had stacked.

All this trouble still didn't stop me from playing for hours on end. There's just too much to do and too much fun to be had. It's no longer enough to guide your human pet to the bathroom. Sims also have wishes, such as repairing the toilet or finding true love. Fulfilling these wishes earns you Karma, a new feature exclusive to the console, as well as special abilities, such as the self-explanatory Steel Bladder.

Even though the town divisions make the console version a lot less fluid than the PC one, the controls are surprisingly satisfactory and the action is just too fun to resist. Plus, the PC version lacks sweet achievements like "Extinguish a Sim on fire" and "Make Woo Hoo."

ANDY SAYS

I've never played a *Sims* game, and wouldn't have expected a console version to be so decent. *The Sims 3* is as user-friendly as can be, so don't feel shy if you're a fellow newb.



UNLESS YOU HEART THE ELDERLY

It's up to you whether you'd like the town residents to progress through life or just sit around as-is. Watching them evolve and form relationships on their own is fun, but I like to turn off aging. Otherwise, your town will transform into Geriatricville before you reach the top of that corporate ladder.

REAP THE INTERWEBS

If there's anything I've learned from the Internet, it's that there are people out there who are much more creative and dedicated than I. That's why a feature like The Exchange, accessible via the main menu, is so convenient. Using it, you can upload and download houses, clothing, and furniture. You can also visit The Exchange when creating a Sim or buying new furniture for your home.

KARMA IS A YOU-KNOW-WHAT

PS3 XBOX 360

GAME DETAILS & RATINGS

THE SIMS 3

INFO
Publisher: Electronic Arts
Developer: The Sims Studio
Platforms: PS3, Xbox 360

MULTIPLAYER/ONLINE
Online trading

GENRE
Simulation

RELEASE DATE
October 26, 2010

SUITABLE FOR
Sims fans, megalomaniacs interested in virtual world domination

WHAT'S GREAT:
- Active, thriving town with self-driven Sims and diverse places
- Impulsively helping/smiting Sims with Karma powers
- Sim fashion and potential player creations

WHAT'S NOT SO GREAT:
- Long loading screens every few city blocks
- Not enough Karma Powers
- Sims forget orders when in different sectors

- Active growth
- Loading times
- Karma fun

OVERALL RATING: 4.25/5

DEAD RISING 2

Paint the town red... in zombie guts • Words: Lizzie Cuevas

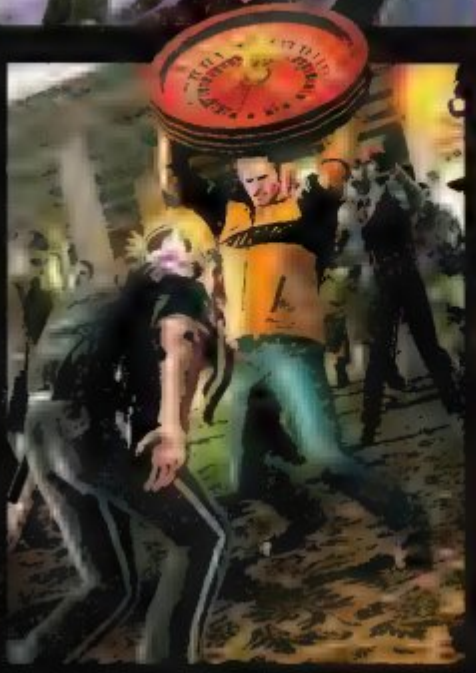
Maybe Fortune City was once a place that lived up to its name—swarming with tourists, high-rolling gamblers, and extravagant nightlife. But in *Dead Rising 2*, the only fortune is reserved for those who survive the zombie-ocalypse long enough for the military to pick them up. Frank West's days from the first game may be over, but in Capcom's gruesome sequel it's time for former motocross champion Chuck Greene to survive in the infested city for 72 hours... and that time is running out.

Dead Rising 2 brings back a lot of great elements from the first game, just multiplied by 10. You can still pick up pretty much any item to defend yourself, but now you can also create your own zombie-cidal weapons by combining items together. Our favorite was the Fireworks Bazooka, created with a lead pipe and fireworks, which blows zombies into bits that fly in every direction. Killing zombies with weapon combos earns you more "Prestige Points" than your regular ol' weapon, bringing faster leveling up and more weapon combinations to unlock.

Fortune City brings a vast area for Greene to explore. Much like a virtual Vegas strip, Fortune City is rich in malls and casinos. And, of course, with 10 times more space in which to run around, *Dead Rising 2* has 10 times more zombies, providing endless opportunities for an undead genocide.

This may sound like a cakewalk for zombie-killing vets, but there are other things you have to deal with until the military arrives. You have to find medicine for your daughter every 24 hours, and also find out what caused the outbreak. If you're thinking you could use some help, you'll thank *Dead Rising 2*'s makers for adding two-player co-op, so the epic bloodbath can become a fantastically seamless shared experience.

The downer with *Dead Rising 2* is that the 72-hour timer has returned. You'll already want to try to kill as many zombies as possible and tinker around with all of the weapons, so why add restrictions? When you go to the mall to shop, you don't set a time limit—and if you had to fight for survival because zombies started flooding the mall, you wouldn't say, "Wow, just look at the time... I really need to get home." Come to think of it, there's not much difference between an undead onslaught and a good Black Friday sale.



WIL SAYS:

The weapon crafting and co-op mode really made this game more than I expected. It's great to see that Capcom pushed *Dead Rising 2* forward, rather than just creating a brainless repeat of the first game.

MULTIPLAYER MODE

COMPETE WITH FRIENDS (OR FOES)

Not only has *Dead Rising 2* added online co-op for Story Mode, but it also offers a four-player online mode called *Terror is Reality*. Based on the Story Mode's reality game show, *Terror is Reality* is almost an *American Gladiator*-type of competition, where you and up to three other players try to kill as many zombies as possible. The highest-scoring player wins the most cash, which can be used in Story Mode to purchase items, such as medicine for your daughter or food to stay alive. *Terror Is Reality* features nine arenas with different game types, including "Slicecycles," a game introduced at the start of Story Mode, where you ride motorcycles with chainsaws sticking out the sides.

[redacted]

If you're not sure that you want to drop the green on *Dead Rising 2*, you might want to try out the Xbox 360–exclusive *Dead Rising 2: Case Zero*, which is only downloadable via Xbox Live Arcade and costs $5. It gives you a sneak peek of what the weapon-creation process is like in *Dead Rising 2*, but best of all gives you the ability to carry your character ranking over to the full game, so you'll have a headstart when you jump in there. *Case Zero* continues the first game's story three years later, and starts you off with *Dead Rising 2*'s main hero, Chuck Greene.

PS3 XBOX 360 PC

GAME DETAILS AND RATINGS

DEAD RISING 2

INFO
Publisher: Capcom
Developer: Blue Castle Games
Platforms: PS3, Xbox 360, PC

MULTIPLAYER/ONLINE
Two-player online co-op, four-player online competitive multiplayer modes

GENRE
Action-adventure

RELEASE DATE
September 28, 2010

SUITABLE FOR
Zombiephiles and people who enjoyed the first game

- ❤ Thousands, and thousands, and THOUSANDS of zombies
- ❤ Combining weapons to make the ultimate zombie extermination device
- ❤ Being able to invite a friend for some zombie-bashing co-op
- ✖ We don't like time restraints on our zombie killing

GAMER

- Endless zombies
- Killer weapon combos
- Epic gorefest

OVERALL RATING: 4

FINAL FANTASY XIV ONLINE

The less things change the more they stay the same — Words: Meghan Walt

A huggable moogle's "kupo!," the Chocobo theme song, spiky-haired heroes and spunky heroines—these are the classic charms that make long-time *Final Fantasy* fans trip over themselves to grab the latest edition in whimsical adventuring. With stunning visuals and every quintessential *Final Fantasy* element, *Final Fantasy XIV* is an MMORPG ($12.99/month subscription) that captures the spirit of what makes level grinding, crafting, and character classes so darn awesome...for at least a while.

A story-driven introduction will trick you into thinking you're bound for an epic journey filled with colorful characters and heroic quests, but soon after you're left to fend for yourself. An NPC will toss around terms and hand you an unhelpful tutorial quest, but that's the last you'll hear about any story for a long, long while.

At this point, we wouldn't put it past some players to give up. Having to deal with the awful keyboard controls and find the mysterious Camp Whatever is a challenging prospect.

But once you learn the basics it's hard not to be thrilled by the versatile job system and the feeling of adventure instilled by a bustling city followed by an open plain of battle-hungry monsters. But that feeling of adventure is replaced by aimlessness when you're forced to perform a lot of ho-hum tasks. No matter how interesting the skill sets or pretty the scenery, it's hard to feel like a hero when you're chopping logs and chasing anthropomorphic mushrooms. On the other hand, it's easy to be bedazzled by the *Final Fantasy*-ness of it. Right, kupo?

THE INTRO STORY MAKES YOU THINK YOU'RE SET FOR AN EPIC JOURNEY

THE BALANCE GAME

You kited Hell's Gatekeeper all the way to the city? Great. This is just wonderful. Thanks. Good job! *Really.*

BETA CONCERNS

MMOs are living, breathing organisms. As such, it's difficult to tell exactly how FF14 will grow and mature over time. When we played, the game had menu lag, no PvP, lengthy quest cooldowns, unbalanced classes, no auto-attack, enmity issues, no auction house, a weak control scheme, and far too much reliance on the mouse and side menu. Square Enix promises to address these issues, but time will tell.

GET A JOB IN *THIS* ECONOMY?

Unlike in FF11, you don't have to wait to get a second job, nor are you limited to a certain number of jobs. Instead, you can try out any job you want—from conjurer to blacksmith to any of the 18 classes—simply by purchasing and equipping the proper tool. Not only is it easy and fun to diversify, but it gives you the chance to do things solo or party up with...well, anyone.

SO MUCH FOR SELF-DISCIPLINE

Square Enix promised to fix the quest cooldowns, but as of the beta you could only attempt eight quests in 48 hours. In the beginning levels, those quests can take five to 10 minutes to complete. So what do you do in the meantime? Level grind. Yup, that's gonna stop the hardcore addicts.

PS3 PC

GAME DETAILS AND RATINGS

FINAL FANTASY XIV ONLINE

INFO
Publisher: Square Enix
Developer: Square Enix
Platforms: PS3, PC

MULTIPLAYER/ONLINE
Massively multiplayer

GENRE
MMORPG

RELEASE DATE
September 30, 2010 (PC), March 2011 (PS3)

SUITABLE FOR
Final Fantasy-aholics, MMO-starved shut-ins

WHAT'S GREAT:
- The game's beautifully detailed graphics are a sight to behold
- You're encouraged to experiment in a limitless class system
- As you'd expect, it's filled with classic *Final Fantasy* elements

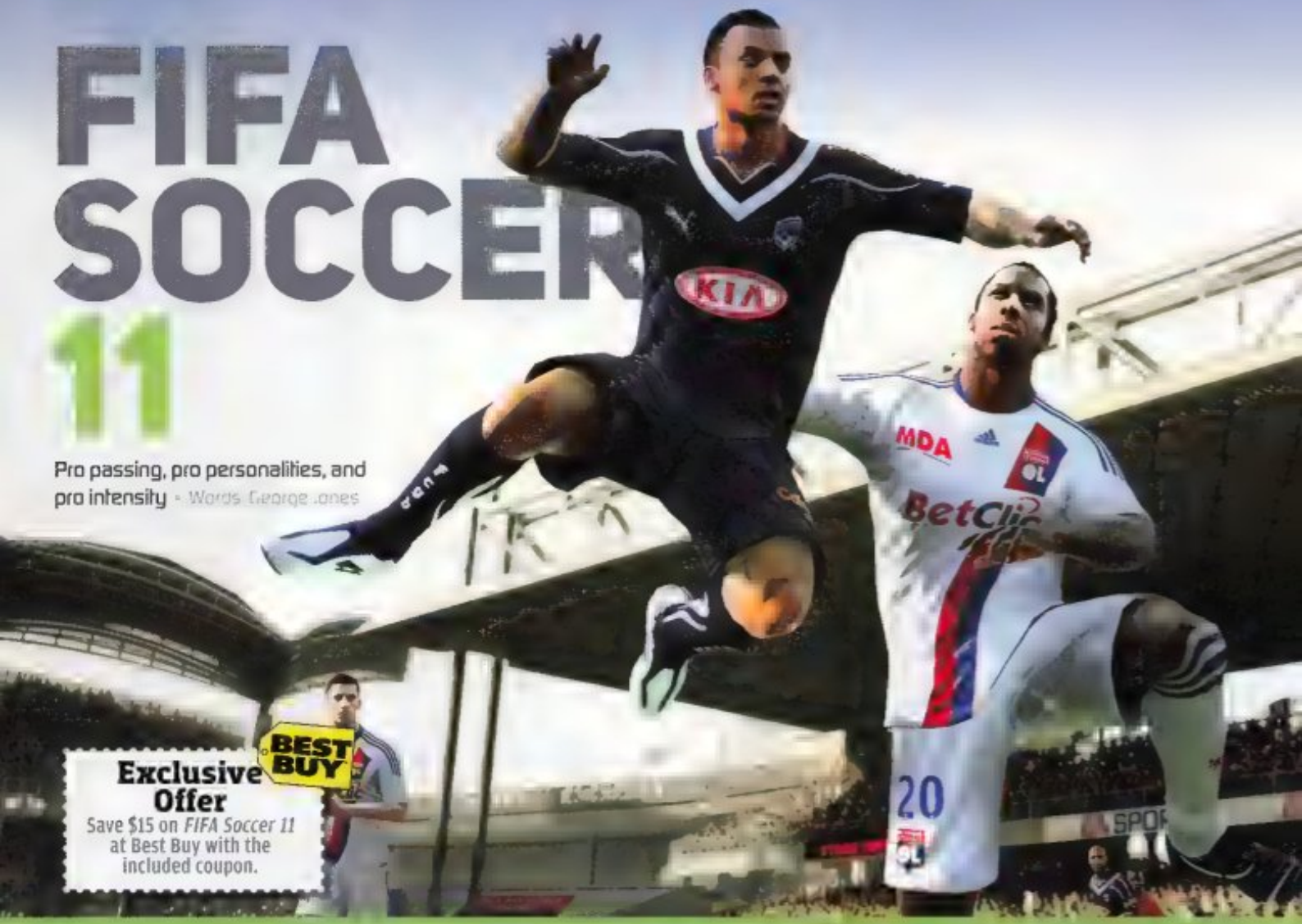
WHAT'S NOT SO GREAT:
- You're saddled with limited, hard-to-learn controls
- Purposeless quests aren't rewarding
- Quest cooldowns inhibit gameplay flow

ATGAMER
- Visual awe
- Kill/fetch quests
- Class diversification

OVERALL RATING: 3.5/5

FIFA SOCCER 11

Pro passing, pro personalities, and pro intensity • Words: George Jones



Exclusive Offer
Save $15 on *FIFA Soccer 11* at Best Buy with the included coupon.

At its core, *FIFA*'s always been the ultimate head-to-head smack-talking sports game. The pace is slow enough that you can have a full conversation while playing a match, and the low scores inherent to the sport make each contest tense and riveting. To this date, there is no better way for two friends to settle a friendly grudge.

I'm happy to report that *FIFA 11* is no exception to this time-honored tradition. Playing match after match of "Winner stays on" is one of my favorite ways to spend a Saturday afternoon. *FIFA 11*'s visually fantastic, and new realism-enhancing features make the game even more intense. Understanding this, EA Sports has expanded the game's multiplayer dimensions, resulting in a major breakthrough: You can now play full 11-on-11 contests online (Xbox 360 and PS3 only) with both friends and anonymous competitors.

Perhaps the biggest change in *FIFA 11*, however, is a renewed emphasis on realism. Previous *FIFA*s have been criticized for making the passing game unrealistically easy and the game too fast-paced. In this version EA's battened down the hatches. The days of "ping-pong" passing—where you just keep passing to advance the ball—are officially over, and the new passing model is nothing short of a revelation.

We were worried that making the passing game more realistic would make *FIFA* too slow-paced and difficult. Wrong. Despite the fact that the game has actually been slowed down by about 10%, each match feels even more intense and frenetic than before. Improved player physics create a more physical-feeling game that amplifies the intensity, and the changes to the passing game and reduced pace result in more 2-0, 1-0, and 2-1 scores.

FIFA 11 also includes an excellent Career Mode that allows you to play through consecutive seasons as a player, manager, or both. As a player, Career Mode is great because it allows you to play the role of a real-life player (there are thousands of footballers from all over the world) or, alternatively, create your own player and advance him into the top-tier leagues by playing well every weekend. In a series first, he can even be a goalie. As a manager, you have to dictate on-field strategy and make key personnel decisions on a daily basis. It's more fun and addictive than it might sound.

Our only real complaint is that the single-player Pro setting is too easy and Expert is too hard—we couldn't find a sweet spot. In terms of multiplayer this doesn't matter, but it makes for some frustrating moments in Career Mode.

No more ping-pong passing. You now have to target who you're passing to and make real plays.

THE NEW PASSING MODEL IS NOTHING SHORT OF A REVELATION

GOALIE PLAY

One new feature is the ability to play as a goalie. As a goalie, you'll attempt to stop shots on goal by using the left analog stick to maneuver your player and the right analog and buttons to perform specific actions. Three different levels of AI assistance can help improve your play. To alleviate boredom, you can give offensive players guidance by calling for passes to specific players, and also set up plays down the field that your teammates can follow if they choose.

ANDY SAYS:

FIFA 11 for the Wii still features a full roster of international players and allows you to play a traditional game of 11 on 11 soccer. But in keeping with EA Sports' tradition, the Wii version of *FIFA 11* foregoes many of the realism-enhancing features, such as Personality Plus and Pro Passing, in favor of a unique tricks system and a new 5-on-5 street mode that feels like a perfect fit for the Wii version of the game.

Street Mode closely resembles the *FIFA Street* games. You take control of one five-person international team and compete against other 5-person teams in urban arenas. You can change everything, including the size, shape, and placement of the goals. A new trick system allows you to fake out your opponent using the Remote, who can defend against your tricks by getting physical with his.

PS3 XBOX 360 Wii PC DS PSP PS2

GAME DETAILS AND RATINGS

EVERYONE E

FIFA SOCCER 11

INFO
Publisher: EA Sports
Developer: EA Canada
Platforms: PS3, Xbox 360, Wii, PS2, PSP, DS, PC (download only)

MULTIPLAYER/ONLINE
Up to 11-on-11 online

GENRE
Sports

RELEASE DATE
September 28, 2010

SUITABLE FOR
Sports fans who love the style, glamour, and intensity of the international game

WHAT'S GREAT:
- The graphics and player animations are so realistic they're pretty much lifelike.
- Head-to-head play is more intense and entertaining than ever
- New Pro Passing model makes for a more realistic and rewarding experience

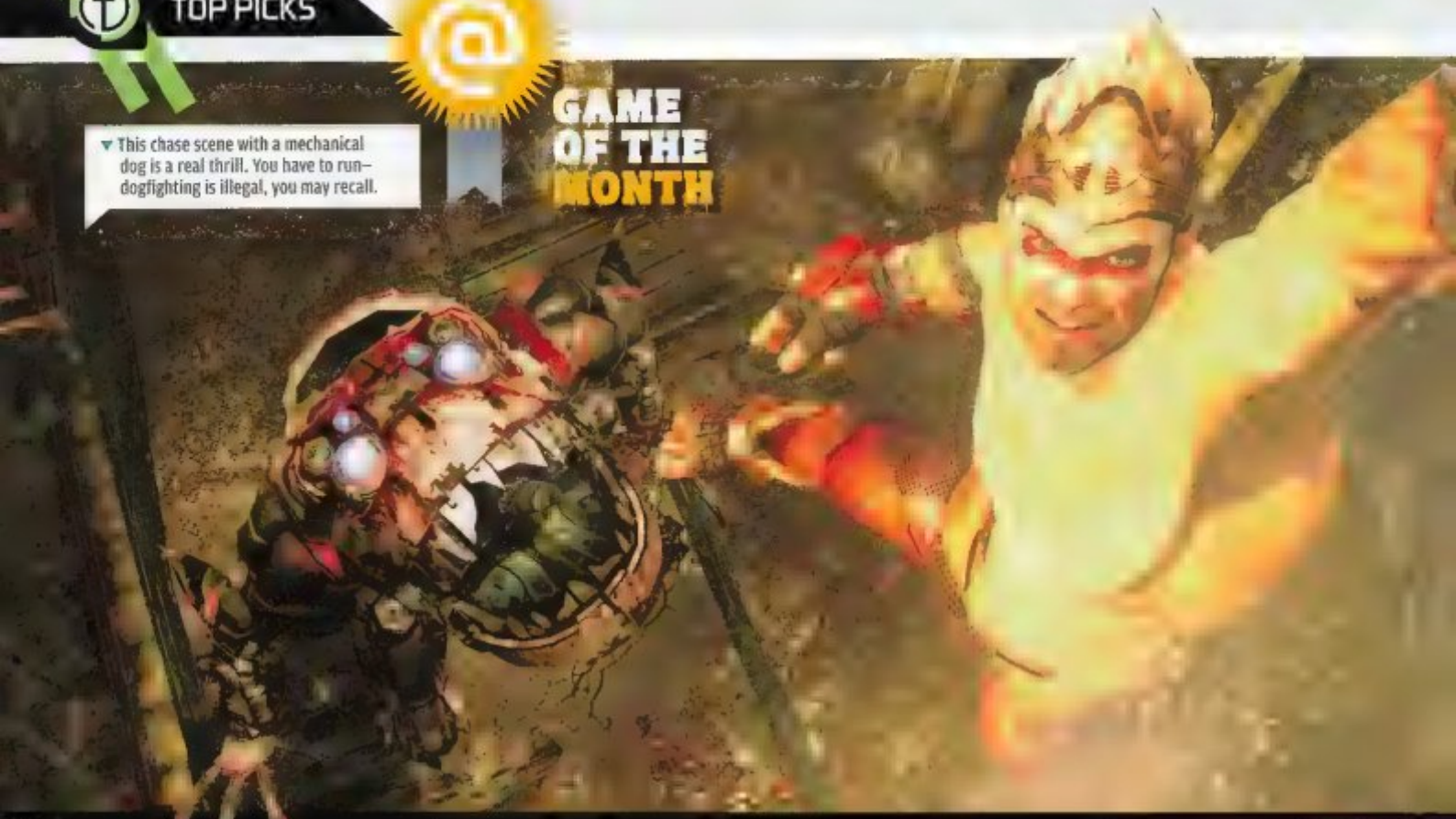
WHAT'S NOT SO GREAT:
- it may be hard to find the right difficulty level for you
- Single-player tournament mode isn't so hot

GAMER

- Intense international play
- More realistic than ever
- 11-on-11 multiplayer!

OVERALL RATING: 4.5/5

GAME OF THE MONTH



▼ This chase scene with a mechanical dog is a real thrill. You have to run—dogfighting is illegal, you may recall.

ENSLAVED: ODYSSEY TO THE WEST

Ninja Theory's post-apocalyptic chimp is no chump • Words: Mitch Dyer

The New York City of the future is a dilapidated wreck. At the same time, it's as astonishingly gorgeous as it ever was. *Enslaved: Odyssey to the West* captures a unique beauty to create a world with an interesting history, but exploring its present is where the real excitement awaits.

Enslaved is a tightly vertical game, and most of your time as the brutish and likable Monkey will be spent climbing crumbling walls, swinging from rebars, and leaping around obstacles. Wandering often rewards you with story-based secrets, sweet scenery, and weapon upgrades. Take your time to soak everything in.

Monkey's wide range of abilities presents myriad opportunities to try thrilling new feats. Smacking slavers with a staff, ripping machine-guns off robots, surfing on the rubble of the Brooklyn Bridge, and discovering satisfying solutions to thoughtful puzzles breaks up the exploration nicely. These and other activities keep things moving at an almost-perfect pace, which kept us hooked on the immensely enjoyable journey to... um, the west.

The story, interesting as it is, takes a backseat to the superb gameplay, yet it still works well. While *Enslaved* downplays its character development during its brief cinematics, the game never leaves its heroes hanging—it just doesn't spotlight their interaction and growth.

Monkey and his sidekick Trip have a handful of heartfelt moments that are quick, subtle, and believable, thanks to great performances and character chemistry. Their tumultuous path is as interesting as your goal of getting Trip home safely. It also makes for a pretty powerful and provocative, if abrupt, ending.

This is a game whose minor flaws detract so little from the overall experience that they're almost entirely inconsequential. It's easy to overlook, say, the combat's simplicity when everything around it rocks from top to bottom.

We rarely have the pleasure of enjoying something as thoroughly impressive as Ninja Theory's *Enslaved: Odyssey to the West*. This familiar composition of established ideas feels original in its own right, and it easily stands out as one of this year's greatest games.

WIL SAYS:

Having spent some time with Enslaved I gotta say this is a downright fun game to play. Some may have a difficult time adjusting to the game's controls, though.

HISTORY LESSON

Enslaved: Odyssey to the West is loosely based on the ancient Chinese novel by Wu Cheng'en, *Journey to the West*—or *Monkey*, as it's more commonly known. The nearly 2,400-page epic follows a magically powered cast's quest for knowledge and Buddhist scrolls, and is one of China's four most revered novels. The others—*Romance of the Three Kingdoms*, *Outlaws of the Marsh*, and *The Story of the Stone*—inspired games such as Dynasty Warriors, Suikoden, and... uh, *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*.

Trip
This savvy red-head enslaved our main man for her own greedy goals.
Pigsy
A lifelong friend of Trip's family and a resourceful aide to the second half.
Monkey
This brute is a grumpy dude with a surprising amount of heart.

THAT'S JUST CRAZY...

Enslaved is surprisingly funny, especially Monkey's exasperation at Trip's antics. At one point, Monkey and Trip walk into a ruined building full of empty SkillTV boxes. When Monkey asks what they are, Trip replies, "Ancient, unfinished technology." Take that, SCEA! Even the future hates you!

SERKIS CIRCUS

Actor Andy Serkis, famous for playing Gollum in The Lord of the Rings, takes on the role of Monkey in Enslaved. Ninja Theory used motion capture to record stage performances, facial animation, and voiceovers simultaneously. Monkey's movement animations, as well as his natural chemistry with Trip, owe a lot to this. This isn't the first time the studio has taken advantage of this tech and Serkis' talents. We saw it in Ninja Theory's PS3 launch title, Heavenly Sword. Serkis also starred as that game's villain, King Bohan.

▲ Surfing on Monkey's "Cloud" device is a fun means to change the pace of platforming.

▲ You don't have to relive *Fallout 3*'s morose color palette thanks to these beautiful, colorful environments.

ENSLAVED STANDS OUT AS ONE OF THE YEAR'S GREATEST GAMES

PS3 XBOX 360

GAME DETAILS AND RATINGS

ESRB T

ENSLAVED: ODYSSEY TO THE WEST

INFO
Publisher: Namco Bandai
Developer: Ninja Theory
Platforms: PS3, Xbox 360

MULTIPLAYER
Single-player only

GENRE
Action-adventure

RELEASE DATE
October 5, 2010

SUITABLE FOR
Those who love the thrill and spectacle of a satisfying journey

WHAT'S GREAT:

- ❤ Phenomenal level design makes traversing the varied and gorgeous settings a blast
- ❤ Funny and likable characters by way of great acting and killer character chemistry
- ❤ A nice variety of things to do with near-perfect pacing

WHAT'S NOT SO GREAT:

- ✖ Shallow combat and an abrupt ending could have used a little more attention

AGamer

- Atypical apocalypse
- Astonishing setting
- Exciting exploration

OVERALL RATING: 4/5

EA SPORTS MMA

Kick, punch, it's all in the cage • Words: Andrew Hayward

Mixed martial arts' blend of brutal violence and dynamic fighting techniques has made it a cultural sensation, and that pairing also makes it the perfect subject for a videogame, as THQ's recent *UFC Undisputed* series has proven. *EA Sports MMA* marks Electronic Arts' first foray into the burgeoning sport, and if you found *UFC Undisputed*'s complex commands tough to stomach, you may find it easier to roll with *MMA*'s analog stick-based attacks.

Based on the same game engine as last year's superb *Fight Night Round 4*, *EA Sports MMA* borrows the boxing sim's analog punching interface, letting you throw jabs, uppercuts, and spinning back fists with flicks of the right stick. High-flying kicks are handled with the same stick (by holding a button), while clinches and ground maneuvers let you use the face buttons to fight for position and trigger devastating submission moves. *MMA* still offers a lot of complexity in its fighting techniques, but makes it very easy for mixed martial arts novices to jump right in and feel comfortable.

Luckily, *MMA*'s Career Mode does a solid job of teaching advanced actions during extensive training sessions. But the bigger victory here is that it's a more varied and interesting option than *UFC Undisputed* or *Fight Night* have recently delivered. As your created fighter ascends the ranks, through low-level leagues and international training excursions towards the Strikeforce or Mystic championship, you'll feel the thrill of building your own ultimate warrior... while busting dozens of faces.

However, it's the online play that really makes this a can't-miss offering for *MMA* fans, as the fast-paced combat and wide array of maneuvers results in a fighting experience that's about as much fun to watch as it is to play. Don't dare miss the Live Broadcast mode, which is one of the most innovative online modes I've seen in any game, sports or otherwise. In the weekly event, selected players will have a chance to fight on the world

YOU = PUNCHING BAG

As in *Fight Night* and *Tiger Woods*, *EA Sports MMA* supports the Game Face feature, which enables you to upload your photo (or that of a secret rival) to EA.com and create a fighter in its likeness. Now you can live out your fighting fantasies (or pound on that secret rival) without fear of pain or retribution!

stage, with live commentary and self-made hype videos making you feel like a true contender with every frenzied takedown.

EA Sports MMA still has a few first-game issues on display—such as numerous presentational hitches and a pretty limited set of offline play modes—but the killer online play and stellar Career Mode make this an exciting and thankfully accessible way to feel like a bad, bad man in the virtual cage.

LEGENDARY BRAWLERS

EA Sports MMA's fighters are anything but unknown scrubs. Cover athletes Fedor Emelianenko and Randy Couture are absolute legends, with more than 50 wins between them. Joining them are favorites like Frank and Ken Shamrock, Jake Shields, Robbie Lawler, and Jason Miller. Despite UFC's past feud with EA, many of the fighters have had prominent careers and fights in the UFC, even recently.

KNOW YOUR DISCIPLINE
Each fighter has different specialties. Grapplers need to know how to deal with strikers.

BEST BUY

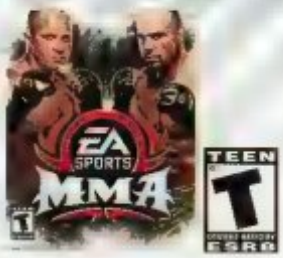
Exclusive Offer
Save $15 on EA Sports MMA at Best Buy with the included coupon.

ANDY SAYS:

UFC Undisputed has been the reigning champ of the MMA genre by virture of being the only kid in the ring. With EA Sports MMA now making a run at the belt, things will only getter better. Competition is a good thing.

PS3 XBOX 360

GAME DETAILS AND RATINGS



EA SPORTS MMA

INFO
Publisher: EA Sports
Developer: EA Tiburon
Platforms: PS3, Xbox 360

MULTIPLAYER/ONLINE
Live broadcast, online, 1-on-1

GENRE
Sports

RELEASE DATE
October 19, 2010

SUITABLE FOR
Fighting fans looking for a technical, but accessible, fix

WHAT'S GREAT:
- Simple commands and solid tutorials make it easy to kick some virtual tail
- Excellent online modes convey brutal thrills and the feeling of fighting on the world stage

WHAT'S NOT SO GREAT:
- Light on play options
- Lacks the presentational polish and oomph of UFC

@gamer

- Brutal combat
- Fierce fighters
- Awesome online

OVERALL RATING: 4.5/5

PS3 XBOX 360

MATURE 17+

M

ESRB

VANQUISH

Publisher: SEGA
Developer: PlatinumGames
Platforms: PS3, Xbox 360

Single-player only

Third-person shooter

October 19, 2010

Folks jonesin' for more *Gears of War*-style blasting

GAME DETAILS AND RATINGS

- ❤ Easily mastered run-and-gun action
- ❤ Art style reminiscent of *Gundam Wing*
- ❤ Supremely rewarding upgrade system

- ✖ No multiplayer and a short main story
- ✖ There's a button dedicated to smoking... seriously!
- ✖ Lacks a little inspiration

- Rockets!
- Robots!
- Railguns! (oh my...)

OVERALL RATING: 3.5/5

Robots: Sometimes you just gotta kick the things around a bit. Or a lot.

VANQUISH

A perfectly fine way to feed your need for explosions Words: Andy Salisbury

Ian Fleming had it right. It doesn't matter what year it is, how peaceful the real world might be, or what terrors plague us—James Bond can always find an enemy in Russia. In many ways, *Vanquish* emulates the Bond recipe with a clear-cut enemy in the Russkies and their typical goal of destroying the United States.

Enter Sam Gideon, a chain-smoking, foul-mouthed, former-college-football-star-turned-super-weapon who acts as our high-tech Bond stand-in. The dastardly Russians have commandeered a U.S. space station and divert its power stores into a blast that destroys most of San Francisco, effectively declaring war on the "stars and bars."

At *Vanquish*'s core is some of the most satisfying gunplay available in any modern shooter. Whether you're firing an assault rifle on the run, sniping from a distance, or launching rockets at crowds of baddies, each weapon feels exactly as you'd hope. It's all very easy to get the hang of and plays like a mix of *Lost Planet* and *Gears of War*.

Vanquish doesn't break the mold of third-person shooters by any means, but I don't think it was ever meant to. It doesn't try to be anything that it isn't, and while the game is admittedly short (and a lack of multiplayer hurts the replay factor tremendously), it's not a bad way to spend your weekend.

WE DON'T NEED NO STINKIN' ROBOTS

We Americans aren't always the smartest with our money. While we spent millions of dollars on a suit of armor that turn a single human into an unspeakably deadly killing machine, we neglected to create mechanized soldiers to do our dirty work for us. Evidently, this was a field that Russian scientists excelled in, given that you only seem to fight robotic opponents, both big and small. Maybe we'll have a bit more foresight next time?

WIL SAYS:

PlatinumGames has great pedigree, with members involved in *Okami* and *Viewtiful Joe*. By comparison, *Vanquish* is surprisingly by-the-book, which is a little surprising. It's still good fun to blast robots, though.

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ROCK BAND 3

Rock Band goes Pro. And lo! The music genre will never be the same again.

Words: Jaz Rignall

THE OLD ADAGE "NO PAIN, NO GAIN" IS TRUE FOR *RB3*

For its third outing, the *Rock Band* series has evolved in a very interesting way. For regular players, it's pretty much business as usual: Everything you know and love about the series has been improved incrementally. Three-part harmony vocals from *Rock Band: Beatles* and a new instrument—a keyboard—have been added, but ultimately it's business as usual with crisper aesthetics.

Rock Band 3's evolution comes in the form of its Pro Mode, which you play using *RB3*'s all-new Pro instruments. These devices are designed to replicate the feel of an actual instrument, and can allegedly help you learn how to play the real thing. Sounds like a tall order, but it's not as crazy as it sounds. But I'll get to that later. First, let's just quickly run through the basics.

Rock Band 3's music selection is terrific: its vast list of 83 crowd-pleasing tracks covers the entire musical genre spectrum, spanning five decades from the 1960s to the 2000s in the process. And all your old *Rock Band* tracks work—giving you an enormous roster of tracks to choose from.

Gameplay-wise, the overall feel is spot-on—it has that classic *Rock Band* feel that has a little bit of forgiveness on the easy levels, but requires a deft hand on expert. Played the usual way with the classic instruments, *Rock Band 3* absolutely delivers. Fans of the series will feel well at home, and will love playing it.

So what happens when you go Pro? Well, that's why I just talked about "classic instruments" and first evaluated *Rock Band 3* using them only—because Pro Mode is almost an entirely new game.

I believe a lot of people are going to buy *RB3* thinking it's going to make learning a new instrument easy and convenient, the same way that people go out and buy fitness equipment because they think the pounds will miraculously roll off with little or no effort. Unfortunately, the old fitness adage "no pain, no gain" is true for *RB3*. It takes time and effort to successfully learn how to play.

What *RB3*'s Pro Mode does do is make learning fun, and lets you play a game while you do. But let me be clear: it doesn't make it easy, and it's no shortcut. You're going to have to practice, practice, practice. If you do that, you really will learn the basics so that you can step up to the real thing. That's something I think is seriously cool, and really legitimizes the music game as something more than just a party piece. An amazing achievement for the series, and the music genre as a whole.

THE SONG REMAINS (LARGELY) THE SAME

Playing with regular Rock Band instruments delivers the Rock Band experience we all know and love. Traditionalists can fully enjoy a complete Rock Band 3 experience without ever turning on Pro Mode.

GOING PRO

This all-new Squier Stratocaster Pro guitar controller is helping *RB3* take the music game genre to a whole new evolutionary level. It looks like a guitar, because it is! It can be played like any other regular guitar. But plug it into *RB3*, and thanks to sensors on the guitar's fret boards, it can also be used as a regular guitar controller. Use it in Pro Mode and you'll learn to play a real guitar while playing your favorite music game. Amazing!

MEET THE PRO GUITAR, THE NEXT EVOLUTION IN MUSIC GAMING PERIPHERALS

01 105 BUTTONS

Yes, you read that right. Boasting an incredible 105 buttons, the Mustang guitar does an amazing job of simulating a real guitar.

02 FEELS GOOD

Using the Mustang as a regular controller takes a bit of getting used to versus the normal guitar, but once you're up to speed its feel is great.

03 STRING THEORY

Your eyes do not deceive you. Those are six strings, and you'll need to learn to use them all when you tackle Pro Mode.

04 STEP UP AGAIN

Squier have made an amazing guitar that's both the real thing and a *RB3* controller, so you really can learn to play, and play to learn.

SPOILED FOR CHOICE

Rock Band 3 is fully compatible with previous games' setlists and all downloadable Rock Band tunes, giving you access to an absolutely enormous library of tunes!

PS3 XBOX 360 Wii

ROCK BAND 3

GAME DETAILS AND RATINGS

INFO
Publisher: Electronic Arts
Developer: Harmonix
Platforms: PS3, Xbox 360, Wii

MULTIPLAYER ONLINE
Up to seven players local and/or online

GENRE
Music

RELEASE DATE
October 26, 2010

SUITABLE FOR
Music fans of all ages

▲ There are plenty of new challenges to keep even the most seasoned *Rock Band* players coming back for more.

HOW YOU LEARN

Where gaming becomes a music lesson

Rock Band 3's Pro Mode will feel very familiar to regular players. The basic gameplay works the same way: Notes scroll down the screen, and you have to hit them. But instead of pressing combinations of five colored buttons to successfully play them, you press the right combo of button/string/key presses on your Pro Mode instrument. This faithfully mimics what your hand positioning would be on a real instrument. It takes a lot of getting used to, but perseverence pays off—the game and instruments really do help you get a feel for the real thing!

ANDY SAYS...

My love of music games is well documented and I'm most excited about RB3 because of the ability to use real instruments.

WHAT'S GREAT:

- A great setlist of varied tunes from throughout rock history
- The gameplay, looks and presentation have all been finessed for the better

WHAT'S NOT SO GREAT:

- Fundamentally the same game if you're not in Pro Mode
- The Pro Mode instruments are a requisite purchase if you want to experience all of what *Rock Band 3* has to offer

- Rockin'
- Rollin'
- Learnin'

OVERALL RATING: 4.5/5

Midi Pro
This widget lets you connect Midi instruments to *Rock Band 3*.
Bass Pedal
Grab your rhythm sticks and prepare to learn how to really drum!
Ebony and Ivory
Live together in perfect harmony with *RB3*'s newest instrument.

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Mini Reviews:

Of course, size doesn't matter. These games are more than worth your attention.

Driving in circles has never been more thrilling.

F1: 2010

EVERYONE E ESRB

Words: Jaz Rignall

Publisher: Codemasters • Developer: Codemasters • Platforms: PS3, Xbox360, PC (digital download)

The F1 World Championship is open-wheel racing featuring super-light karts powered by screamingly powerful engines made by European marques such as Ferrari, Mercedes, Renault, and Cosworth. It's fast. It's exciting. And it makes a fantastic racing game. The audio-visuals of this sim-racer are simply fabulous, and every car, track and driver is fully represented in superb detail. It's as complete an F1 game as there has ever been. So how does it play? Well, F1 driving is very fast and technical, and that has also been faithfully replicated in this game. Skill and racing finesse are a must, and practice and perseverence are the keys to success. F1 2010 is a racing game you have to learn to play: and because of that, I feel it's a game that only harcore racing fans will absolutely love. If that's you, F1 2010 is a must-have. If it's not, well, it's not.

MULTIPLAYER/ONLINE: Up to 12 racers
GENRE: Racing
RELEASE DATE: September 2010
SUITABLE FOR: Super-hardcore racing fans

OVERALL RATING: 4.75/5

RACQUET SPORTS

EVERYONE E ESRB

Words: William O'Neal

Publisher: Ubisoft • Developer: Asobo Studio
Platforms: PS3

When Sony announced the Move Controller for the PS3 we expected a spate of games vying to knock Wii Sports off the motion-control mountain. While the underwhelmingly titled Racquet Sports is a marked improvement compared to Wii Sports, it pales in comparison to other racquet-based sports games for the Move, namely table tennis in Sports Champions. Previously available for the Wii, the game boasts five modes: tennis, beach tennis, squash, badminton, and table tennis. While they're all fun enough, table tennis was kind of difficult to master. If you're just a tennis fan in general you'll welcome the game's support for online play, unlockable equipment, and all of the available characters. Also, like Wii Sports, in the right setting with the right people, these kind of games are always fun. And at around $30 at least it's not gonna break the bank.

MULTIPLAYER/ONLINE: Four online and split-screen
Sports
September 14
Wii wannabes with PS3s

OVERALL RATING: 2.5/5

Racquet Sports' visuals are fantastic. Think *Wii Sports* in HD.

Online play means being able to rise in the ranks and even brag to the world.

SUPER SCRIBBLENAUTS

Words: Jordan Baughman

Publisher: Warner Bros. Interactive Entertainment • Developer: 5th Cell • Platforms: Nintendo DS

Super Scribblenauts is the rare sequel that completely fixes the flaws of its predecessor. Yes, you can now move Maxwell and his goofy rubber-chicken hat around with the directional pad. With no more clunky movement, this new iteration is a puzzle gamer's dream.

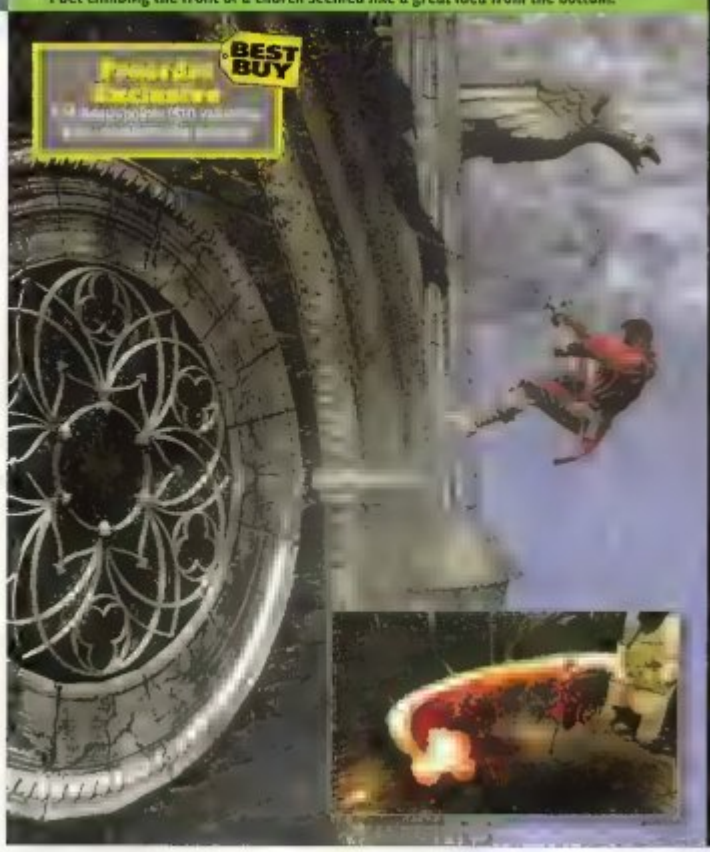
The series' tagline is "create anything, solve everything" and truer words were never spoken. You summon whatever you think will help you solve a puzzle simply by writing its name. Super Scribblenauts expands on this with the inclusion of adjectives to add characteristics to the objects. With over 120 stages and an in-depth editor to create your own, you've got a puzzler so open and diverse that it's almost absurd. Super Scribblenauts is a must-have for the Nintendo DS.

MULTIPLAYER/ONLINE: Single-player only; online level sharing
GENRE: Puzzle
RELEASE DATE: Oct 12, 2010
SUITABLE FOR: Puzzle game enthusiasts and logophiles

OVERALL RATING: 4.5/5

▼ The totally busted movement system is a thing of the past. Be free, young Maxwell!

▼ As you're probably aware, a solid majority of life's puzzles can be solved with a giant turtle.



▼ I bet climbing the front of a church seemed like a *great* idea from the bottom.

CASTLEVANIA: LORDS OF SHADOW

Words: Andy Salisbury

Publisher: Konami • Developer: MercurySteam/Kojima Productions • Platforms: PS3

Few things are more satisfying than single-handedly tearing down droves of poorly trained opponents. This tradition began with Dynasty Warriors, and is proudly carried on by Castlevania: Lords of Shadow.

Lords of Shadow puts you in the shiny boots of Gabriel, the man in charge of saving the world. His skill set expands quickly throughout the game, giving you a massive arsenal of whipping and slashing abilities to tear down opponents, both big and small. With the boss battles that crop up constantly, you're bound to have plenty of challenges.

Should you be the type of player who enjoyed Devil May Cry, Heavenly Sword, or God of War, check out Lords of Shadow. There's plenty of fun to be had, and masses of underlings to rip limb-from-limb.

MULTIPLAYER/ONLINE: Single-player only
GENRE: Action-adventure
RELEASE DATE: October 5, 2010
SUITABLE FOR: Anti-vampire bigots

OVERALL RATING: 4/5

PROFESSOR LAYTON AND THE UNWOUND FUTURE

Words: Chuck Osborn

Publisher: Nintendo • Developer: Level-5 • Platforms: DS

In Professor Layton's London, almost every social interaction is punctuated by a devilish puzzle. From brain-teasing logic puzzles to riddles to fiendish math problems, you'll be challenged from start to finish in this time-traveling adventure.

Boasting more voice acting and animation than the series' previous two installments, *Unwound Future* also spins an engaging central mystery involving a London of the future menaced by a surprising villain. Professor Layton stalwarts will recognize some rehashed puzzles, but this quest is as intriguing as ever.

MULTIPLAYER/ONLINE: Weekly downloadable puzzles
GENRE: Puzzle
RELEASE DATE: September 12, 2010
SUITABLE FOR: Motivated problem-solvers

OVERALL RATING: 4/5

▼ It's hard to overstate just how wacky and convoluted the plot is, even for a time-travel story.

Layton's pastel take on 19th-century London is as quaint, charming, and puzzle-y as ever.

▼ Cool shield bro, but it's not helpin' your ugly mug very much.

ARCANIA: GOTHIC 4

Words: David Chapman

Publisher: JoWood Entertainment • Developer: Spellbound Entertainment • Platforms: PS3, Xbox 360, PC

Back in 2001, PC gamers got their first taste of *Gothic*. Now, nine years and two cult sequels later, console owners are finally getting a piece of the action/RPG pie with Arcania: *Gothic* 4.

RPG fans will probably get that sense of déjà vu all over again, as *Arcania* follows nearly every cliché to a tee. Despite generic plot elements, a lot of work went into the main story and it's actually pretty engaging. Unfortunately, you're constantly bombarded by side missions lacking that same attention to detail. People will literally jump out of nowhere and order you to do something with no rhyme or reason.

Arcania's eye candy is easily its biggest draw: The world looks great and has a lot of detail. *Gothic* 4 definitely has its merits, but not enough to make it a first-tier choice for Action-RPG seekers.

MULTIPLAYER/ONLINE: Single-player only
GENRE: Action-RPG
RELEASE DATE: Xbox 360/PC: Oct 12, 2010; PS3: Q2 2011
SUITABLE FOR: Action/RPG fans looking for a quirky fix

OVERALL RATING: 3.25/5

This PSP edition improves the graphics and makes numerous other little changes.

KNIGHTS IN THE NIGHTMARE

TEEN T ESRB

Words: Heidi Kemps

Publisher: Atlus • Developer: Sting • Platforms: PSP

Few games have longer learning curves than *Knights in the Nightmare*—there are hours of tutorials. Beyond them is a unique blend of strategy, role-playing, and action unlike anything else. You're an ephemeral "Wisp," darting around battles to summon souls of fallen warriors, bestow weapons, and order attacks, while avoiding screen-filling enemy attacks. Battles require strategy and swift reflexes.

Knights was originally a DS stylus game, so on PSP it feels less precise. Loading times are also an unwelcome addition. However, the beautiful visuals are superior on PSP, and its dark fantasy story is still excellent. New features deliver a great experience for old and new players alike—provided you have the patience.

MULTIPLAYER/ONLINE: Single-player only
GENRE: Action-Strategy
RELEASE DATE: November 9, 2010
SUITABLE FOR: Strategy fiends willing to invest some effort

OVERALL RATING: 4.25/5

FINAL FANTASY: THE 4 HEROES OF LIGHT

EVERYONE 10+ E ESRB

Words: Andy Salisbury

Publisher: Square Enix • Developer: Square Enix • Platforms: DS

Final Fantasy: The 4 Heroes of Light is without a doubt a full-bodied RPG. Sure, it comes in a small package, but if you're willing to look past that you'll find the complete *Final Fantasy* experience.

The 4 Heroes of Light has a turn-based combat system. Action Points, gained automatically through combat, act as currency for spells. Pair that with the newly introduced Auto Mode (where you assign one ability to a party member, which is executed until you defeat your foes), and the soul-crushing drudgery associated with grinding is somewhat lessened.

This game does have its fair share of challenges. Often a boss will kill you in one or two attacks unless you spend a substantial amount of time leveling up. Still, if you're looking for a complete RPG in a small package, this is one of the best.

2-4 players (ad-hoc)
RPG
RELEASE DATE: Oct 5, 2010

Heroic children destined to be keepers of the light

OVERALL RATING: 3.75/5

Yet more hero-children depart for world-saving adventures. They cannot yet do a barrel roll.

▼ New equipment will change your appearance.

▼ Bosses are real jerks, so grind beforehand.

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GEAR

92 Alienware M11XR2 Gaming Laptop
94 Gunnar Optiks MLG Phantom Mercury Performance Eyewear
95 Able Planet NC300W True Fidelity Headphones

Where to purchase:

ONLINE OR IN-STORE

Some of these products are available in-store, while others are available at BestBuy.com. Be sure to check with your local store for availability.

WIL SAYS:

This month we got our not-so-grubby, somewhat large hands on some interesting products. The Alienware M11XR2 may look like a netbook, but it doesn't act like one. We also tested Gunnar Optiks MLG "gaming" glasses. And does a great set of headphones make for a great gaming headset?

Words: William O'Neal Photos: Mark Madeo

The WLED screen may be small but it's high-res, with a full 720p resolution.

The softly lit keys are eye-friendly, while the glossy screen lets you fix your hair.

Rest easy: Space debris will not actually emerge from the screen.

ALIENWARE M11XR2
GAMING LAPTOP

I'm a longtime fan of high-end gaming laptops. Until recently, any gaming laptop worth its salt was basically a desktop replacement with a 17-inch screen, that got about 90 minutes on a single charge, and could weigh in at upwards of 15 pounds. Less "portable" than "transportable," you pretty much set the thing up and moved it as little as possible. Enter the Alienware M11XR2 from Alienware and Dell.

The M11XR2 looks like it might be a netbook, but that's where the comparison ends. Once you pick it up, your first reaction is that it's both plenty solid and heavier than you may expect, considering how small it is. That said, at just a hair shy of five pounds, it's nothing next to the 15-pound behemoths that dominate the gaming market. Firing it up for the first time, the most shocking revelation was how fast the thing was. With 4GB of RAM, Intel's Core i7 processor, and Windows 7 Ultimate 64-bit, that shouldn't have come as a surprise—but remember, this thing is tiny.

Where the M11XR2 really shines are its 1GB NVIDIA GeForce GT335M graphics card and 11-inch 720p WLED display. The graphics card's power means that the games we played...err, tested were super-smooth and looked great. Now, the M11XR2 doesn't ship with an optical drive, but since most PC games are available via Steam, we had no problem packing the 451GB hard drive—yes, that's nearly half a terabyte—full of games to play.

If you're looking for an awesome gaming laptop, but don't want to have to lug around a monster, the M11XR2 is a perfect choice. The only real drawback is that, while the screen is bright and crisp, at 11 inches it may be on the small side for game playing. That said, the system offers an easy solution: With HDMI out, you'll have no problem hooking this up to a high-end display or HDTV.

Words: William O'Neal

Never prop up a laptop like this. They really hate it.

It's got the sleek Alienware styling. For a little extra cash you can engrave your name on the case.

Alienware software lets you customize the softkeys and other aspects of the system.

Alienware M11XR2	
Call of Duty 4	48fps
[illegible]	37fps

Alienware M11XR2	
Graphics	1GB NVIDIA GeForce GT335M
Display	11" 720p WLED with HDMI output
Processor	Intel Core i7 2.2 GHz processor
[illegible]	4GB RAM
[illegible]	4[illegible]GB HDD
[illegible]	Windows 7 Ultimate 64-bit
[illegible]	4.4 lbs.
[illegible]	Four to five hours

INFO

MANUFACTURER:
Alienware
www.alienware.com

RETAIL VALUE:
$949.00 base;
$1,319 as tested

RATINGS:

- Small
- Sleek
- Fast

OVERALL RATING:

5/5

GUNNAR OPTIKS
MLG PHANTOM MERCURY

INFO

MANUFACTURER:
Gunnar Optiks
www.gunnars.com

RETAIL VALUE:
$79.00

RATINGS

- Comfy
- Stylin'
- Pricey

OVERALL RATING: 3.5/5

Hardcore and competitive gamers are an interesting bunch. While it's true that we love games, we also love stuff. And Gunnar Optiks performance glasses fall squarely into the "stuff" category.

For years, companies have been trying to leverage a gamer's need for a competitive edge into some groundbreaking piece of technology. I've seen more than enough failed FPS controllers for several lifetimes, and the world of gaming mice is rife with ridiculous designs. This may explain why I was skeptical when the Gunnar Optiks MLG (Major League Gaming) Phantom Mercury performance glasses showed up. "Gaming glasses," I snickered, "they can't be serious." Here I am two weeks later, and I wear them all day, every day. Simply put, they work.

The glasses are designed to reduce the eyestrain that often results from hours of non-stop gaming and/or computing; they're scratch-resistant and pretty comfortable as well. Gunnar designed these glasses specifically for competitive gamers, who tend to sit closer to their displays than casual gamers. As a result of this, casual gamers may not notice the benefit the glasses offer. Additionally, the lenses boast a slight amber tint, so gamers who are picky about the colors in their games may not like that. I, for one, dig them. I have bad eyesight and the glasses' slight magnification helps.

All things considered, I will continue to use these glasses indefinitely—the difference is quite noticeable. But with a $79 price tag, it's likely only hardcore gamers will want to invest in Phantom Mercury shades.

Nose pads keep the shades from weighing down on the bridge of your nose.
Everything will look a little amber when you're wearing these. You'll quickly adjust, though
The wraparound design can accomodate larger heads with ease.
$80 shades had better be scratch-resistant!

Words: William O'Neal

ABLE PLANET

NC300W TRUE FIDELITY HEADPHONES

The problem with many so-called "gaming" headsets is that, great as they sound, they're not necessarily made for gaming. Such is the case with Able Planet's NC300W True Fidelity headphones. Able Planet is known for making high-quality gear for audiophiles, which is why we were surprised when the NC300Ws showed up.

We tested the NC300Ws like we test all headphones: by plugging them into our Zune player and smartphones and loading up music and videos. Simply put, we were truly impressed. Likewise, we plugged them into several desktop and laptop computers, and threw every possible Mixcrate.com mix we could find at them, and were genuinely impressed once more. As with many love affairs, though, this one was short-lived. Not necessarily designed for gamers, the NC300Ws are only really useful if you're sitting within a few feet of your system. The short cord is fine at a desk, but if you're sitting 10 feet away from your system, no dice. And there's no mic, so while your online buddies are free to talk all the trash in the world, you're at a loss to reply.

If you typically game solo on a PC, and you're looking for headphones that offer great audio, then you'd be more than happy with the NC300Ws. If, on the other hand, you're in the market for great cans designed for gamers, you're better off with Able Planet's EXTREME Gaming Foldable headphones. They come with a longer cord and all-too-important boom mic—though they'll also set you back $189.

Highly adjustable, they should fit most any gamer.
Audio quality is generally excellent... they're great for music listening.
The noise cancelling tech works wonderfully.
The ear cushions make these really comfy, though you might overheat sometimes.
The volume dial is handy. Too bad the cord is so darn short.
ableplanet

INFO

MANUFACTURER:
Able Planet
www.ableplanet.com

COMPATIBLE WITH:
360, PS3, PC

RETAIL VALUE:
$89.99

RATINGS

- Quality
- Short
- Mic-less

OVERALL RATING

3/5

If you have some videogame "facts" you want to verify as real or urban legend, ask Andy: Send your questions to andy@atgamermagazine.com.

Games...they speak my language!

It's something we don't think about too much as we play: How our favorite game characters talk. In the earlier days of videogames, you'd get a 2-D image of a character and the dialogue as words on the screen, and had to use your imagination to "hear" the character's voice. Now, the technology supports actually having characters talk with lip-synching, so it actually "looks" like it sounds.

But characters don't have autonomous thought, so it still takes someone to go into a studio to record each line of dialogue from a script, building the character's personality through the spoken lines. This month's "Truth or Lies" looks at a few notable voice actors working in the game industry—and how they talk to us.

TRUTH OR LIES:

I know it's weird, but I have a crush on Cortana. Visually, Bungie certainly has "hottied" her up, but it's her voice that gets to me—authoritative yet soothing. My friend told me that when the 1 vs. 100 game show was on Xbox Live, the female host was voiced by the same actress. That can't be, can it?

TRUTH

Jen Taylor: seasoned pro and soothing computer lady.

Indeed, Jen Taylor gave voice to both... and more than a few others you might remember. Her diverse credits range from Zoey in the *Left 4 Dead* games to First Lieutenant Keira Stokes in *F.E.A.R. 2: Project Origin* to Cate Archer in *No One Lives Forever 2*. Perhaps her most-heard voices are of Princess Peach and Toad in numerous Mario games.

The two Uncharted games were great fun, but the action was really enhanced by the believable voice acting. Nathan Drake in particular made me want to watch the cut-scenes instead of skipping through to get back to the gameplay. You just don't find that kind of acting talent in many videogames.

LIES

Adventurer by day, glamorous headshot model by night.

It turns out "that kind of acting talent" is actually quite common, as actor Nolan North has many game credits. They include Desmond Miles in *Assassin's Creed*, the Prince in 2008's *Prince of Persia*, Jason Fleming in *Shadow Complex*, and assorted voices in *Call of Duty*, *Halo* games, and other titles. If you can't wait for more *Uncharted*, North hinted earlier this year that a third installment is coming (Sony has yet to publicly announce it).

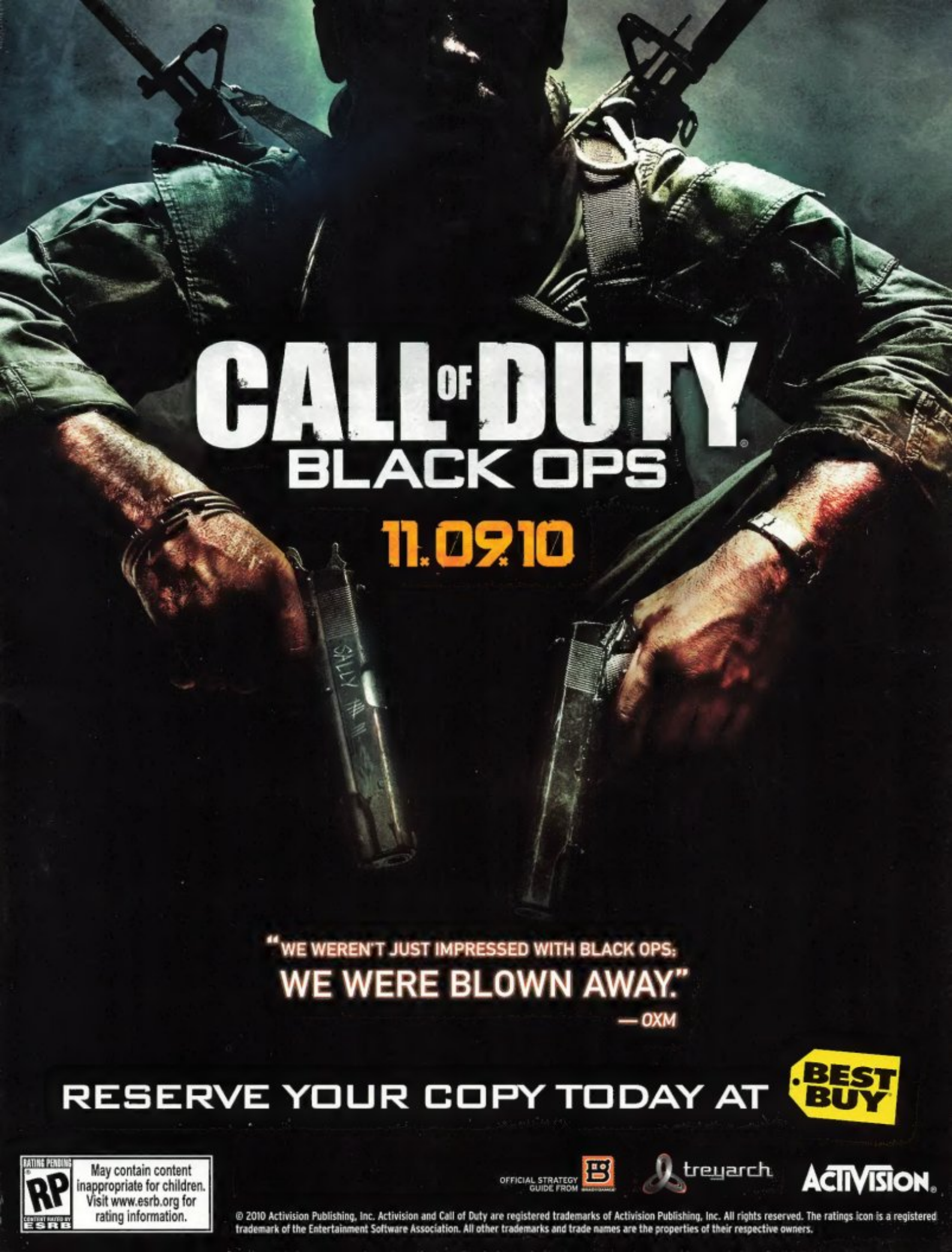
My friend knows I'm a Faith No More fan, but surely he's pulling my leg when he says that the lead singer has also done videogame voices.

TRUTH

He sings, he raps, he does growly monster voices, in that order.

While we don't know your friend, in this case he's trustworthy. Mike Patton, who raps and croons in Faith No More's "Epic," has done a few notable game voices. Perhaps his gutteral "What is it?" in the song led to growling the dialogue in Take-Two's *The Darkness*. More recently he voiced *Left 4 Dead*'s infected and *Portal*'s snarling Anger Core. But unlike seemingly every other voice actor, he's never done a *Halo* game.

Tell us what you think of @GAMER in this quick 5-question survey http://tiny.cc/FirstToKnow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